REGIONAL PARKS BACKGROUND STUDY

REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, a desire among Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board Directors to protect regionally-significant natural areas, coupled with the potential to create a network of greenway linkages between Comox Valley communities, prompted the Board to explore the potential establishment of a Comox Valley Regional Parks Service. To help guide the effort, the Board commissioned a *Regional Parks Background Study*.

The *Background Study* is a research piece designed to help local government decision-makers understand what regional parks are, why regional parks services get established, and what a regional parks service in the Comox Valley could look like. Examples of existing regional parks services in high-growth parts of British Columbia — Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland and the Okanagan — are profiled to help identify the service structure options available. Recommendations on a framework for a Comox Valley Regional Parks Service are provided for consideration, should the CVRD and its member municipalities decide to establish such a service.

In outlining a potential service structure, the *Background Study* considers first the matter of service definition. Based on an understanding of opportunities and needs in the Comox Valley, the interests both of the individual jurisdictions and broader regional community, and the lessons from regional parks services elsewhere, the *Study* recommends that decision-makers consider a regional parks service that focuses, primarily, on the acquisition and protection of regionally-significant natural areas throughout the Comox Valley. The provision of regional greenways would be an additional focus of the function.

The *Background Study* recommends that any new service be region-wide in nature, with participation by all electoral areas (including the Islands) and all member municipalities. Service governance would involve a Regional Parks Service Committee of the CVRD, created to oversee the service, and to provide recommendations on all service matters to the Board. The *Study* recommends a customized voting structure for the Committee designed to address concerns of participating jurisdictions related to control over important decisions, including those related to the acquisition of lands and the development of service budgets. Such rules would apply only at the Committee level to guide the Committee's development of recommendations to the Board. The Board, under the prescribed *Local Government Act* voting rules on financial and acquisition matters, could choose a different course of action. Strong support for the model voiced by all local governing bodies, however, would underscore the legitimacy and add to the weight of the Committee's advice.

To fund the service the *Study* recommends the use of property value taxes. A portion of requisitioned funds would be allocated to a reserve dedicated to land acquisition and development. The full tax burden would be allocated among participating jurisdictions on the basis of converted assessment — the default method in the *Local Government Act*.

The recommendations in the *Regional Parks Background Study*, it should be emphasized, do not speak to the question of whether local governments should establish a Comox Valley Regional Parks Service; nor do the recommendations presume that decision-makers will choose to proceed with service establishment. The recommendations are provided simply to help guide decision-makers' efforts in the event that they decide to explore the establishment of a regional parks service further.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) provides three local, community parks services to unincorporated parts of the region. Service 619 focuses on the provision of community parks and greenways on Denman Island in Electoral Area A; Service 620 focuses on the provision of community parks and greenways on Hornby Island in the same electoral area. Service 621 covers the remainder of Area A and all of Electoral Areas B and C. This service, formally titled *Baynes Sound, Electoral Areas B & C Parks & Greenways*, is by far the largest of the CVRD's local community parks services in place.

The City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland — collectively, the CVRD member municipalities — provide local, community parks services within each of their respective jurisdictions. These services, similar to those provided by the CVRD to the electoral areas, are funded by local taxpayers, and are designed primarily to meet the needs of local residents related to outdoor recreation, enjoyment of natural spaces, and connection to nature.

In several of British Columbia's regional districts, electoral areas and member municipalities have come together to provide regional parks services. These regional services are designed to complement rather than duplicate local parks functions, and to address needs that local services are not able to meet. A regional parks service was established by the Comox Strathcona Regional District in 1971 to raise funds, acquire lands and develop park management plans.[1] The service was made dormant in the late 1990s, however, following a number of attempts to expand and bolster the function. Since 1998, the Comox Valley has been without any regional parks function.

In 2020, a desire among CVRD Board Directors to protect regionally-significant natural areas, coupled with an interest in creating a network of greenway linkages between Comox Valley communities, prompted the Board to explore the potential for establishing a new regional parks service. To guide the effort, the Board set out a three-part process, the first part of which called on CVRD staff to undertake, in collaboration with their municipal counterparts, a *Regional Parks Background Study*. Neilson Strategies Inc. (NSI), a local government consultancy with experience in regional service design and regional parks functions, was retained to assist the parties.

[1] The Comox Strathcona Regional District (CSRD) preceded the Comox Valley Regional District. The CSRD was dissolved and replaced by the CVRD and the Strathcona Regional District in 2008.

REGIONAL PARKS BACKGROUND STUDY

Purpose

The *Regional Parks Background Study* is a research piece designed to help the CVRD and its member jurisdictions understand:

- the nature and attributes of regional parks systems as they exist across British Columbia
- regional parks service models in place in other regional districts
- potential rationales for a regional parks service in the CVRD
- service model options that may be suited to the Comox Valley, given the existing community parks services in the region, the perceived need to protect regionally-significant lands, current opportunities for action, and the challenges facing the parties

The *Background Study* is intended to provide service model considerations for a regional parks service, and the steps to follow in the event that the CVRD and member municipalities wish to establish such a service. The *Study* is *not* intended to provide a recommendation on whether to establish a new service. That decision will be made by the affected local governments, informed by the information presented in the *Background Study*.

Approach to the Study

The *Background Study* was administered by the CVRD's Manager of Parks Services, and guided by a Regional Parks Working Group comprised of:

- Manager of Parks Services, CVRD (Chair)
- General Manager of Community Services, CVRD
- Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services, City of Courtenay
- Superintendent of Parks and Building Maintenance, Town of Comox
- Manager of Parks and Recreation, Village of Cumberland

Th Chief Administrative Officers of the Comox Valley Regional District, City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland provided input and direction to the study during three separate group meetings.

The consultant's work program followed closely the terms of reference set out by the CVRD. The program featured a set of interviews with CVRD and municipal staff to review local parks and greenway services in place, and to

understand the range of interests, needs, ideas and concerns related to a potential regional parks initiative. Individual interviews were conducted with members of the Working Group, and with additional members of CVRD and municipal staff involved in local parks and greenways services. Separate one-on-one interviews were held with the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) of each local government.

The consultant's work program also featured a considerable amount of research, beginning with an in-depth examination of each jurisdiction's local parks service. Research on existing regional parks services in three Vancouver Island regional districts, and three regional districts in other high-growth parts of British Columbia, was then undertaken to understand the different service models in place today. Based on the many research findings, service model options for the CVRD were identified and assessed against a set of evaluation criteria. The research findings, options and criteria were brought together in this *Report* for presentation to Comox Valley local governments.

Report Format

The remainder of the report is divided into the following chapters:

- *Chapter 2: Setting the Stage* — Chapter 2 introduces regional parks and regional parks services. Characteristics that help define regional parks as a distinct level of public park are identified to start the chapter. Benefits associated with regional parks are then explored, along with the various reasons that tend to drive the establishment of services through regional districts. The past and potential future of regional parks in the Comox Valley are reviewed to end the chapter.

- *Chapter 3: Local Parks and Greenway Services in the Comox Valley* — This chapter profiles the local parks and greenways services of the CVRD (Electoral Areas), City of Courtenay, Town of Courtenay, and Village of Cumberland. The profiles are used to identify the types of parks and greenways that are in place across the region, and to understand the types of parks and greenways that are not in place. An understanding of the park and greenway needs that are not addressed by local services may help to inform discussions among local government decision-makers in the Comox Valley on the perceived value of, and potential desire for, a regional service.

- *Chapter 4: Regional Parks Services in British Columbia* — In any study that examines questions of service rationale, feasibility and structure, a review of services in place elsewhere can be useful in helping decision-makers understand the opportunities available as well as the challenges to expect. To that end, Chapter 4 provides a comparative review of six existing regional parks services in regional districts on Vancouver Island,

the Lower Mainland and the Okanagan. Observations and take-aways for the Comox Valley are presented for consideration.

- *Chapter 5: A Regional Parks Service for the Comox Valley* — This chapter examines the options available to decision-makers in shaping the service model "building blocks" that are essential to every regional district service, including those focused on regional parks and greenways. Options for each block are put forward based on the research conducted on regional parks services in other regional districts, interviews with Working Group members and the CAOs, and the consultant's own judgement and experience. The options are assessed against evaluation criteria — one set of criteria per building block — to help craft a potential service model for the Comox Valley.

- *Chapter 6: Recommendations and Next Steps* — The *Report* ends with a set of recommendations on a proposed regional parks service model for consideration by local government decision-makers in the Comox Valley. The recommendations do not presume that decision-makers will choose to proceed with the establishment of such a service. The recommendations are intended, instead, to guide decision-makers' efforts in the event that they do decide to pursue service establishment further.

CHAPTER 2
SETTING THE STAGE

This chapter of the report introduces regional parks and regional parks services. The text begins by identifying the characteristics that can be used to define regional parks, and to set them apart from parks provided by other orders of government. Benefits associated with regional parks are then explored, along with the various reasons that tend to drive the establishment of regional parks services. The past and potential future of regional parks in the Comox Valley are reviewed to end the chapter.

REGIONAL PARKS SERVICES

Definition of Regional Parks

Several regional districts in British Columbia provide regional parks services to acquire, protect, manage, regulate the use of, and provide access to various types of regional parks. Regional governments throughout North America and, indeed, around the world provide similar services. Precise definitions of "regional parks" that are included under individual services vary by region. In most regions, however, regional parks share a number of important characteristics. Consider the following examples:

- *Protect Nature* — Regional parks protect important natural areas from urban or industrial development. In some cases, regional parks act as conservation or preservation areas to protect ecosystems, significant environmental features or wildlife habitats from human contact. In other cases, the parks allow for limited, managed access.

- *Connect to Nature* — Regional parks provide opportunities for people to connect with, learn about and experience nature. When citizens connect with nature, they understand the value of nature and learn respect for their natural environment.

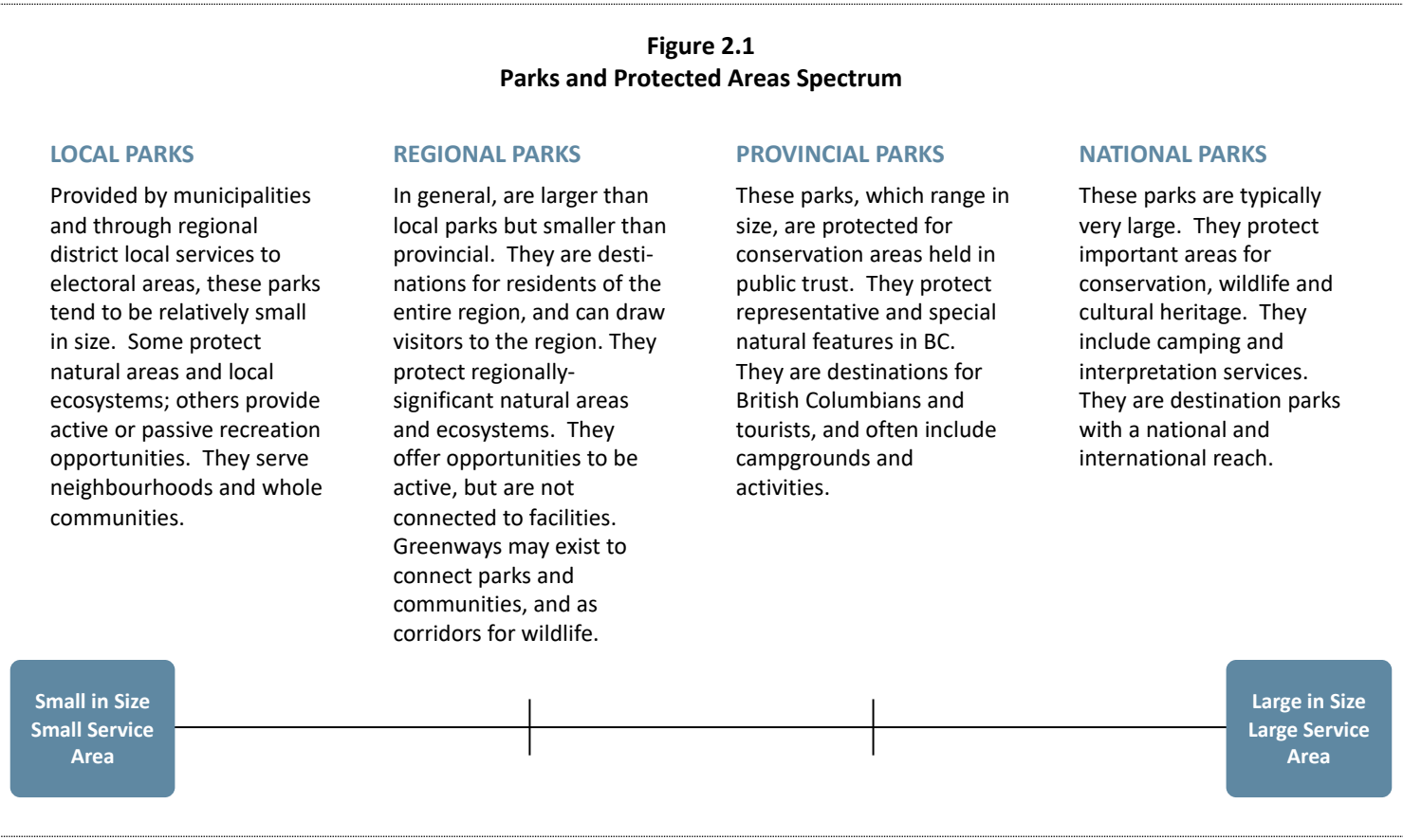
- *Be Active in Nature* — Regional parks provide opportunities for people to be active outdoors in various non-motorized and low-impact activities, such as hiking, trail riding, running, bird watching, walking and paddling.

- *Connect Parks and Places* — Regional Trails and greenways represent a category of regional parks that provides active (i.e., non-motorized) transportation routes, connect regional parks with one another and with other

points of interest, and connect communities within a region. Greenways may also serve as corridors for a region's flora and fauna.

Regional parks are, in general, distinct from local parks that are provided by municipalities or to electoral areas through regional district local services. Regional parks are also distinct from provincial parks. All three types of parks, along with national parks, can be placed side-by-side on a spectrum of parks and protected areas. Figure 2.1 presents the spectrum.

Figure 2.1
Parks and Protected Areas Spectrum



Benefits of Regional Parks

A considerable amount has been written on the health, environmental, social and economic benefits of parks in general, and regional parks in particular.[2] Some of the more important benefits to consider are as follows:

- *Sustainable Growth* — The CVRD's *Regional Growth Strategy* envisions a sustainable region characterized by compact, complete and connected communities, protected natural areas and ecosystems, and resiliency in the face of a changing climate. Regional parks and greenways could help to achieve this vision.

- *Ecosystem Services* — The natural areas protected by regional parks scrub carbon dioxide from the air, clean and filter water, stabilize slopes and landscapes, and mitigate flooding, among other services.

- *Protected Biodiversity* — Regional parks provide protected space for a diverse range of plant and animal species, as well as entire ecological communities.

- *Improved Physical Health* — Outdoor activity, particularly in nature, improves the physical health and resiliency of residents in communities served by regional parks.

- *Improved Mental Health* — People are "hard-wired" to need connection to nature and other forms of life. We rely on close and regular contact with nature for emotional and psychological well-being.[3]

- *Social Connection* — Healthy communities are those in which people connect and spend time with one another. Regional parks and trails provide engaging, outdoor, nature-based opportunities for such connections. And, regional parks provide these opportunities to people of all socio-economic groups.

- *Cultural Recognition* — Regional parks may protect, honour and provide for connection to cultural and heritage sites of importance to First Nations. This benefit may be particularly important to the K'ómoks First Nation and the CVRD.

- *Economic Development and Tourism* — Regional parks draw visitors to a region.

[2] Capital Regional District, "Regional Parks Strategic Plan (2012-2021)"; Lynn Wilson, "Connecting to Nature Where You Live: The Beauty of Regional Parks", George Wright Forum, 2016; UBC School of Population and Public Health, "Where Matters", 2019.

[3] See Lynn Wilson, "Connecting to Nature Where You Live: The Beauty of Regional Parks", George Write Forum, 2016, p. 3.

These benefits exist in all regional park systems, but are particularly evident in systems that serve larger urban areas, as well as in systems that exist in fast-growing regions. Indeed, as regions develop, become more populated and busier, the benefits of regional parks take on added value.

Reasons to Establish Regional Parks Services

Regional districts and their member jurisdictions may be driven to establish regional parks services to capture some or all of these benefits. Local governments may also, however, opt for a regional parks service for many of the same reasons local governments choose to establish other voluntary services at the regional level. Consider the following examples, all of which are interrelated:

- *Pursue Shared Interests* — Local jurisdictions with shared interests may find it more effective, and more equitable, to pursue those interest collectively through a regional service. A regional parks service may be viewed as a useful vehicle for pursuing shared interests related to the protection of regionally-significant natural features, the development of greenways and trails to connect communities in the Comox Valley, or the provision of new destination parks that offer additional ways for residents to be active in, and to connect with, nature.

- *Address Service Gaps* — Local services may be very good at providing certain benefits, and meeting a set of specific needs. By their very nature, however, local services may be limited in purpose and scope, unable to deliver on all needs or desires. A municipal parks service, for example, may be very good at meeting the active recreation needs of residents through the provision of sports fields and ball diamonds, and may succeed in its mission to ensure a fair distribution of local parks and greenspace across neighbourhoods. The same service, however, may be incapable of adequately protecting sensitive ecosystems, particularly if those features extend across local boundaries. A regional parks service may be an effective means to address the service gaps that exist in the local service landscape.[4]

- *Fund Collectively* — Regional district services are an effective way for municipalities and electoral areas to combine resources in order to achieve outcomes that the local jurisdictions on their own could not afford to pursue. Through a regional parks service that accesses and draws on the assessment base of the entire region, partner jurisdictions may be able to afford to acquire important lands that would otherwise go unprotected.

[4] It is important to note that all local jurisdictions in the Comox Valley provide some parks that protect ecosystems and other natural areas. A regional parks service could enhance and expand these existing efforts.

And, in a truly regional service will full participation, benefits and costs would be aligned to maximize fairness and minimize free-ridership.

- *Position the Region for Future Success* — The importance of combining resources to acquire lands may be particularly pronounced in a high-growth region with a limited land base, such as the Comox Valley.[5] Expected future levels of population growth and development in the CVRD will result in higher land values that will, in turn, make acquisition more challenging than it already is. Early action through the establishment of a regional parks service with a mandate to protect lands in perpetuity could help to position the region for future success.

It is worth noting that in the CVRD, unlike in many other regional districts across the province, the relative dearth of public lands may add to the impetus to establish a regional parks system aimed at protecting ecosystems, natural areas and landscapes. The Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E&N) land grant in the 1870s transferred a considerable amount of lands in what is today the CVRD to private forestry companies. Efforts to protect portions of lease lands in a regional parks system would involve negotiations and the development of partnerships with private parties, along with increased revenues. Collective action on the part of local governments through the regional district may be important.

REGIONAL PARKS IN THE COMOX VALLEY

History of Regional Parks

The Comox Strathcona Regional District (CSRD), which existed in place of the CVRD from 1965 to 2008, was granted the authority by the provincial government in 1971 to establish a regional parks service. The authority, which was set out in supplementary letters patent, allowed the CSRD Board to acquire, develop, operate and maintain regional parks throughout the regional district, including in the electoral areas and member municipalities.

With the exception of the Village of Cumberland, all local government jurisdictions of the CSRD were participants in the regional district's regional parks service. Participants included, therefore, all of the electoral areas and three of the four member municipalities that today comprise the Comox Valley Regional District. Denman and Hornby Islands joined with Baynes Sound to include the whole of Electoral Area A in the service area.

Funds were requisitioned through the service to acquire a number of regional parks, beginning with Goose Spit, and including a portion of Seal Bay. The service also successfully obtained a Crown grant for Mount Geoffrey. Expansion of the system, however, occurred at a relatively slow pace — indeed, in its first twenty years the system had grown to

[5] In terms of land area, the CVRD is the smallest regional district in the province.

only six sites with a combined total protected land base of 189 ha.[6] As well, while funds for acquisition were collected through the service from all participating jurisdictions, park development, operation and maintenance fell to the electoral areas alone.

In 1992, the CSRD created a planning document for the regional parks service titled *Establishing a Vision for Parks*. This document attempted to focus attention on the need for a regionally-supported regional parks system to protect significant landscapes and natural areas, and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities. The document tried to build on the momentum created by a 1987 regional park planning exercise by highlighting the environmental, recreation and economic benefits of regional parks to all jurisdictions, and by underscoring the growing risks to the region's existing natural environment from population, development and industrial activities. The vision document was framed as a call to action, pushing member jurisdictions to collaborate in the expansion and provision of a robust service. Ultimately, however, the document failed to achieve its purpose. In 1998, the regional parks service was allowed to become dormant after failed attempts by the Board to agree on a new service scope. Acquisition funds that remained unspent in the service were returned to the member jurisdictions.

In 2008, the newly-incorporated Comox Valley Regional District began a regional growth strategy planning process with its member jurisdictions. During that process, the regional district received a planning study titled *Nature Without Borders: The Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy*. The *Strategy* drew attention to the need for local government jurisdictions to protect sensitive ecosystems across the Comox Valley, noting that 4,700 ha of such lands had been lost or reduced between 1991 and 2002. The report called on local governments to collaborate in the identification and protection of conservation lands. Local governments were encouraged to address the need for conservation using land use planning policies and regulations. The potential to protect lands through a regional parks service was not a focus of the *Strategy*.

Current Situation

Each local government in the Comox Valley provides its own local parks service to its residents. As will be outlined later (see Chapter 3), each of the services features a relatively broad range of park types. Each service, for example, includes neighbourhood parks with playgrounds and greenspace, designed to benefit residents in the immediate vicinity. Each also provides sports fields and larger community parks, developed to provide opportunities for active recreation and community gatherings. Greenways for active transportation, and heritage parks developed to protect

[6] An additional three sites acquired during the first twenty years are now in Strathcona Regional District.

and showcase historic sites are found in all of the services to varying degrees, as are nature parks that help to protect sensitive local ecosystems and important natural features.

Some of the larger nature parks and, to a lesser extent, greenways included in the local parks services have attributes that are typical of regional parks. Seal Bay Nature Park in the Electoral Areas' Community Parks Service is one of the best examples. The park covers 642 ha, protects regionally significant ecosystems, safeguards and honours sites of cultural heritage important to the K'ómoks First Nation, and provides opportunities for residents to access and connect with nature. Cumberland Lake Park in the Village of Cumberland's local service features 17.5 ha of undeveloped wilderness area, but also serves as a destination for campers and lake users from throughout the Comox Valley and beyond. Examples of parks with regional park qualities can be found in Courtenay and Comox as well, including Millard Creek Park and Conservation Area (Courtenay) and NE Woods (Comox).

Some of the jurisdictions of the Comox Valley have found ways outside of a regional service framework to collaborate in the protection of important sites that benefit the broader region. The Lazo Marsh North East Comox Conservation Area, which includes lands in the Town of Comox and Electoral Area B, is a case in point. This 159 ha wildlife conservation area was established through the collaborative efforts, and with significant contributions from, Comox and the CVRD, along with the K'ómoks First Nation, the BC Government and the Nature Trust of British Columbia. In another more recent example, the CVRD was able to work with the Cumberland Community Forest Society, the Village of Cumberland, a host of habitat and wilderness associations, and a range of other donors to support the purchase of 91 ha of land in the Perseverance Creek watershed by the Cumberland Community Forest Society. The watershed protection initiative was supported by the Comox Valley Water Committee, which identified the need for the purchase in the Comox Lake Watershed Protection Plan.[7] Finally, the CVRD and Town of Comox are currently developing a partnership to connect the Point Holmes community in Electoral Area B with the Town of Comox, and to provide Comox residents with improved access to the Point Holmes foreshore and Lazo Marsh trail network.

Lost Opportunities

The inclusion of parks with regional park attributes in local parks services, and the efforts of jurisdictions (and others) to collaborate outside of the regional district service framework on natural area protection initiatives, have helped the Comox Valley regional community capture some of the benefits of a regional parks service. In the absence of an actual regional service, however, the regional community has not been able to pursue a broader range of opportunities that

[7] Protection of the Comox Lake Watershed is an important initiative for the broader region. Other mechanisms, including a regional parks service, may help to bolster protection and management efforts for this important natural asset.

may be important to current residents and future generations. The following recent examples stand out:

- *Rosewall Creek* — The Regional District was unable to pursue a large potential land acquisition in Electoral Area A near Rosewall Creek Provincial Park because of a lack of funds in the Baynes Sound, Area B and C Parks & Greenways service. This land, which was not protected, was subsequently logged.

- *Oceanfront with Coastal Sand Ecosystem* — An oceanfront site representing a coastal sand ecosystem in Area B was lost because of insufficient funds, despite the site being identified as active priority for acquisition.

- *Seal Bay Park Addition* — A lack of funds also resulted in the loss of an opportunity to expand Seal Bay Park and capture additional ecosystem services.

- *Natural Habitat* — A large parcel of Western Toad habitat land in Electoral Area C— identified as a priority in the *Comox Valley Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan* — was lost because of insufficient funding.

- *Maple Lake* — An effort to acquire Maple Lake and surrounding wetlands (90 ha purchase in all) fell apart in 2017 despite the efforts of a Comox Valley citizens committee. Strong regional support applied through a regional district may have achieved a different outcome.

Potential Interest Going Forward

These (and other) lost opportunities have caused local government decision-makers in recent years to, once again, consider the need for a regional parks and greenways service. In 2020, development pressures that threatened the loss of Stotan Falls in the Puntledge Creek area of Electoral Area C as a regionally-significant environmental feature added to the calls for a new service, and led directly to this *Background Study*.

Over the course of the study, the consultant interviewed Working Group members and the Comox Valley local government CAOs to understand the nature and level of interest in a new service. The following points present some key findings:

- *Growth Pressures* — The Comox Valley is one of the fastest-growing parts of British Columbia. Continued growth and its associated development are threatening sensitive ecosystems and regionally-significant natural areas — Stotan Falls is a prime example — and contributing to increases in the cost of land. Individual local governments, acting alone, are finding it difficult in this high-growth context to acquire and protect important

lands. There is a sense among most of those interviewed that collaboration in the acquisition, protection and management of lands, natural assets and corridors may not only be desirable but necessary.

- *Crowded Destination Parks* — Growth in the Valley is also resulting in the greater use of local sites that serve as *de facto* destination parks for residents of the region. Cumberland Lake Park, which is owned by the Village of Cumberland and operated by the Cumberland Lake Wilderness Society, is a good example of a local park that draws users from across the Comox Valley (and beyond). The Village and Society have invested and continue to invest considerable resources in the development and management of this park. The Village and others would like, however, to see new destination parks in the Valley to absorb some of the growing demand for access to nature. Destination parks with water access are particularly desired.

- *Increased Demand* — Staff from all jurisdictions report significant increase in demand for parks and greenways in recent years. Much of the demand appears to have been driven by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on indoor gatherings and recreation. Increased usage, however, has also been both fuelled and facilitated by new opportunities, such as electric bikes, for people to become active outdoors.

  The important mental and physical health benefits that are associated with parks, and that have been realized by residents throughout the pandemic, may make the increase in demand for parks and greenways permanent in nature. Any sustained increase in demand will, it is suggested, compel decision-makers to explore a regional service approach.

- *Perceived Inequities* — Staff in all jurisdictions point to individual destination and nature parks that are supported solely by local taxpayers, but that benefit users from throughout the region. In general, there is limited desire on the part of interviewees to regionalize existing local assets at this time; however, there is a desire to limit any existing inequities through collective action on new parks and greenways.

- *Importance of Greenways* — In addition to the protection of important natural areas and sensitive ecosystems, the notion of investing in the acquisition, development and management of recreational greenways resonates strongly with almost all of the staff interviewed. Indeed, there appears to be a growing collective vision among Comox Valley local governments for a regional network of greenways to connect communities, facilitate access to parks and other points of interest, and encourage active transportation. The CVRD's recently published *Active Transportation Network Plan* for the electoral areas calls for connections to existing municipal greenways, and could be an important tool in creating a regional network.

CHAPTER 3
LOCAL PARKS & GREENWAYS SERVICES

As noted earlier, the CVRD and the three member municipalities provide their own local, community parks services to their respective local jurisdictions in the Comox Valley. This chapter profiles each of these services in order to identify the types of parks and greenways that are in place across the region, and to understand the types of parks and greenways that are not in place. An understanding of the park and greenway needs that are not addressed by local services may prompt decision-makers to consider collective action through some form of regional service.

The individual jurisdictions' services are profiled using a common template that highlights the following elements:

- *Service Area* — the jurisdictions, or parts of jurisdictions, that receive and support the service
- *Scope of Service* — the range of activities performed and funded through the service
- *Types of Parks* — the different categories of parks, greenways and open spaces identified and included
- *Statistics on Use* — any data collected by the jurisdiction on numbers of visitors and visitors' home jurisdictions
- *Service Governance* — the governing bodies, advisory committees and others who are involved in making decisions for the service
- *Service Delivery* — whether the service is delivered using local government staff, contractors, non-profit societies, or a combination of these options
- *Service Funding* — the amount that is spent on the service, how costs are recovered, and who pays
- *Service Plans & Strategies* — the foundational documents created to guide the service

Additional comments on the service are provided at the bottom of each profile, based on the information in the profile but also on the interviews of service managers — Working Group members — conducted by the consultant.

CVRD COMMUNITY PARKS & GREENWAYS

Service Profile

The CVRD provides a Community Parks & Greenways service to residents of Baynes Sound (Electoral Area A), Electoral Area B and Electoral Area C. The service, formally known as *Baynes Sound, Area B and C Parks & Greenways Service* (Service 621), is profiled in Figure 3.1.[8]

[8] The CVRD also provides community parks services to Denman Island and Hornby Island — Services 619 and 620 respectively.

Figure 3.1
Profile of CVRD Service 621

Service Element	Description
Title	Baynes Sound, Area B and C Parks & Greenways (Service 621)
Service Area	Electoral Area A (Baynes Sound) [9,10] Electoral Area B Electoral Area C
Scope of Service	Through Service 621, the CVRD acquires, develops, regulates the use of, maintains and operates parks and trails in Baynes Sound, Electoral Area B and Electoral Area C.
Types of Parks	The service features 62 local parks, 24 beach accesses, 30 inactive parks and several trails.[11] In all, the following types of parks are provided: • *Community parks* — Intended to provide recreation opportunities for nearby residents, and to increase neighbourhood walkability. Examples include Joe Walker Park in Area A, and Driftwood Marine Park in Area C. • *Recreation areas* — Examples include Pinecrest Bike Skills Park in Area C. • *Nature parks* — Intended to conserve natural features and provide opportunities for passive recreation. Examples include Glover Community Nature Park in Area A, Seal Bay and Little River Nature Parks in Area B, and Nymph Falls and Bear Creek Nature Parks in Area C. • *Recreational and ecological greenways* — Linear parks that connect natural areas, connect communities, and/or protect habitat corridors. Examples include the Royston to Cumberland Railway Trail and the Royston Seaside Trail in Area A, Barbara Road Greenway in Area B, and the One Spot Trail and Eagles Greenway in Area C. • *Beach accesses* — Intended to provide public access to the foreshore. Examples include Gartley Road in Area A, Cloudcroft Road in Area B, and Saratoga Beach Access in Area C.

[9] Prior to 2006 the CVRD provided separate parks services to Baynes Sound (Area A), Lazo North (Area B) and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area C). The three services were amalgamated in 2006.

[10] The CVRD provides separate community parks and greenway services to residents of Denman Island (*Denman Island Community Parks & Greenways Service*) and Hornby Island (*Hornby Island Community Parks & Greenways Service*).

[11] There are close to 125 beach access points throughout the service area; however, only 25 of these accesses are managed by the CVRD through Service 621.

Service Element	Description
	• *Conservation areas* — Intended to protect rare and endangered species and their habitats. The Lazo Wildlife Park in Area B and the qax mot Conservation Area in Area C are examples. Most of the parks in Service 621 exist to provide residents opportunities to access and connect with nature. Most are relatively small parks; however, there are notable exceptions such as Seal Bay Nature Park at 642 ha. Active recreation parks are few in number, although many of the parks feature opportunities for swimming and for launching kayaks, canoes and paddleboards. Some of the trails provide opportunities for mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking.
Statistics on Use	The CVRD collects some data on pedestrian and vehicle traffic for key parks in the service; however, no comprehensive system has yet been developed to clearly show usage numbers or trends. The data that do exist, coupled with anecdotal evidence, confirm that usage of key parks and greenways has been increasing over time, as would be expected with population growth. Seal Bay, Goose Spit, Nymph Falls and other popular destination parks stand out in this respect. Survey data also confirm that these destination parks draw users from across the region.
Service Governance	Governance for the service features the CVRD Board and Electoral Area Services Committee (EASC). The EASC is an advisory body that reviews all matters related to Service 621 (and all other electoral area services) and makes recommendations to the Board.
Service Delivery	CVRD staff in the Community Services Department are responsible for service delivery. Maintenance is largely delivered through partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and mental health groups.
Service Funding	The 2020 budget for the service projected $1.88 million in expenses (actual 2020 spending was lower, at $1.61 million). The 2021 budget projects total spending of $2.03 million. These figures include approximately $97,000 in CVRD corporate administration and overhead costs.[12] Service 621 is funded through property value taxes — $1.55 million in each of 2020 and 2021. A separate parcel tax, introduced in 2013 through Bylaw 270, is charged to all properties in the service area to collect

[12] Corporate administration and overhead costs in the CVRD, as in all regional districts, are allocated among all services in accordance with an overhead allocation policy.

Service Element	Description
	funds for the acquisition and development of parks.[13] The parcel tax charged is $19; total parcel tax revenue collected each year is approximately $193,500.
Service Plans & Strategies	The CVRD has several plans and strategies in place to direct elected officials and staff in the provision and future expansion of the service. The key documents are described here in chronological order: • *Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy (2010)* — The *Sustainability Strategy* was a joint initiative of the regional district and its member municipalities. Section 5 addresses ecosystems, natural areas and parks, and envisions a region with "an open space network that preserves natural areas, sensitive ecosystems, agricultural capacity and key recreation areas." Goal 5.2 focuses on the conservation and restoration of ecosystems. One action calls for land acquisitions through local parks functions to protect sensitive areas. Goal 5.4 addresses access to recreation for citizens. Objective 5.4.1 seeks widespread access to recreational parks and greenways. Associated actions call on the CVRD and municipalities to: – coordinate parks/greenways planning and acquisition – create a region-wide parks and trails network, linked by inter-community greenways – pursue opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs in municipal and electoral areas • *Rural Comox Valley Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan (2011)* — The *Strategic Plan* outlines a strategy to expand the network of parks and greenways in the electoral areas for public access and connection to nature, recreation use and conservation. A vision, goals and objectives for an electoral areas parks and greenway system are provided, as are guidelines and priorities for land acquisition. The *Plan* covers a 20-year period from 2011-2030.[14]

[13] Bylaw 270 charges only one parcel tax to property owners of more than one parcel in cases in which the parcels are contiguous and within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

[14] It is worth noting that this *Strategic Plan*, while written to help guide Service 621, includes priorities that are more regional than local in nature. The Vancouver Island Spine Trail, Western Toad Conservation Park & Migration Routes, Wolfe Lake, and E&N Trail are examples. Action item 8 in the *Plan* highlights a desire to explore the establishment of regional parks service.

Service Element	Description
	• *Regional Growth Strategy (2011)* — The *Regional Growth Strategy* sets out the goals and strategies to guide the significant growth expected in the region by 2030. The *Strategy* promotes coordination among jurisdictions to address a range of issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. One section of the *Strategy* focuses on ecosystems, natural areas and parks. Policy 2A-9 calls for a network of inter-connected municipal and rural parks and greenways to protect recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and natural ecosystems. A separate objective and set of policies support increased access to parks and recreational greenways, and inter-jurisdictional coordination of greenway connections. • *Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan (2014)* — The OCP for the electoral areas sets out ten objectives and thirteen policies to address local and inter-jurisdictional needs for parks and greenways. Taken together, these objectives and policies speak to a desire for: – protection and preservation of sensitive ecosystems – acquisition of lands for parks and greenways – improved access to water bodies – implementation of a valley-wide parks and greenways network • *Comox Valley Regional District Active Transportation Network Plan (2021)* — This *Plan*, released in September of this year, was developed to guide investment in active transportation corridors and facilities in the electoral areas of the Comox Valley. Active transportation priority projects are identified to help create a regional active transportation network.

Comments on the Service

Service 621 provides a broad range of parks and park types designed to meet the local park and outdoor recreation needs of residents in the CVRD's three electoral areas. The service also, however, provides important nature parks that protect regionally-significant ecosystems and environmental features, and that provide opportunities for residents of the broader Comox Valley to access and connect with nature. Seal Bay, Goose Spit and Nymph Falls are three such nature parks that serve as *de facto* regional parks, but are managed and funded entirely by the electoral areas.

The service's twenty-year *Strategic Plan* speaks to the importance of further environmental protection and

conservation, and identifies several properties as acquisition priorities. A separate acquisition fund for the service exists to build reserves to pursue these priorities. The limited size of the fund, however, coupled with the limited tax base on which to raise money for the fund, means that the CVRD will need to rely on non-purchase acquisition tools for new sites.

The CVRD's *Active Transportation Network Plan (ATNP)* was not undertaken through service 621, but rather was developed through the CVRD's Regional Growth Strategy service. The ATNP does, however, advance many of the greenway goals of the local parks and greenways service. Upon receipt of the ATNP, the CVRD Board directed staff to begin developing implementation agreements with a range of partners — member municipalities, K'ómoks First Nation, Ministry of Transportation, School District — to design, cost and determine funding for specific pedestrian, cycling and multi-use active transportation projects. Some of these projects would serve to connect existing CVRD and municipal greenways.

Implementation agreements represent one tool available to local governments in their collective pursuit of greenway connections. Another tool local governments could consider is a regional parks and greenways service. This tool would have the added benefit of being able to address goals related to natural area protection and conservation.

CITY OF COURTENAY PARKS AND TRAILS

Service Profile

The City of Courtenay acquires, develops, maintains and operates a broad range of parks and a system of trails as part of the City's parks and recreation service. Figure 3.2 profiles the City's parks and trails service.

Figure 3.2
Courtenay Parks and Trails

Service Element	Description
Title	City of Courtenay Parks and Trails Service
Service Area	City of Courtenay
Scope of Service	The service includes the acquisition, development, regulation of use (*Bylaw 1664*), maintenance and operation of parks and trails.

Service Element	Description
Types of Parks	Courtenay's system of parks and trails covers a total of 183 hectares.[15] It contains 103 parks, categorized using five park types, or classes:[16] • *Community Parks* — These parks, at least 1 ha in size, are developed to draw residents from the entire City (and beyond). Some feature play areas and sport fields; others showcase built facilities or cultural features. Examples include Bill Moore Park, Martin Park, and Woodcote Park. • *Neighbourhood Parks* — These parks, which are smaller than community parks, are designed to service a specific neighbourhood. They typically include play equipment and related amenities; however, some include environmentally sensitive areas. The Ridge Park, Cooper Park and Hobson Parks are examples. • *Natural Parks* — Natural parks are often large in size (currently up to 14 ha) and are designed to protect and connect people to natural features such as forests and streams. Environmentally-sensitive areas are common in these parks. Examples of Nature Parks include Morrison Park, Lerwick Nature Park and Hurford Hill. • *Linear Parks* — The parks feature trails and greenways. Courtenay Riverway and Airpark is one example; Idiens Greenway and Valley View Greenway are others. • *Greenspaces* — Greenspaces include stormwater ponds and small lots with trees or grass that add to the visual character of the community. Greenspaces do not support significant use.
Statistics on Use	None available.
Service Governance	Decisions on parks and trails are made by City Council. Council is supported in its decision-making by the Committee of the Whole and City staff.
Service Delivery	Staff in the City's Public Works Department maintain all parks, playgrounds and trails. Long-term planning for parks is handled by staff in the Recreation and Cultural Services Department.

[15] School sites and Crown lands in the city bring the total size to 243 ha.

[16] The five-class system of defining parks in the *Strategic Plan* replaces an earlier three-class system in the City's 2016 *Official Community Plan*.

Service Element	Description
Service Funding	Parks and trails operations had a 2020 budget of $2.58 million; $2.71 million in 2021.[17] Operations are funded through the general municipal property value tax. Parkland is acquired using a variety of tools, including taxation and land dedication (development process).
Service Plans & Strategies	Courtenay's acquisition, development and operation of parks and trails are guided by policies in a number of plans and strategies, the most important of which is the 2019 *Courtenay Parks and Recreation Master Plan*. This *Plan* and other key documents are outlined as follows: • *Courtenay Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2019)* — The *Master Plan* was released in 2019 following a three-year process that involved developing an inventory of existing assets, undertaking an analysis of needs, and engaging the community. The vision for parks and recreation speaks to a desire for "diverse parks, interconnected trails, [and] natural areas throughout the City". Goals in the *Plan* seek to enhance access for all, develop an improved network of connected trails, protect significant ecological assets, and collaborate with Comox Valley jurisdictions on planning and programming. The *Plan* recommends the acquisition of expanded community parks, neighbourhood parks and linear parks in the developed parts of the City, and the establishment of natural parks to protect natural habitats and support outdoor recreation. A section on trails identifies 35 km of mapped trails, including the "signature" Valley View Greenway, Courtenay Riverway and E&N Rail/Rotary Trail. The same section highlights the popularity of trails, but also the lack of connectivity. Recommendations include extensions to trail corridors within the City, and working with other jurisdiction in the Comox Valley on the development of major trail networks. • *A Blueprint for Courtenay: Official Community Plan (2016)* — The OCP is the land-use policy document created to guide future growth and development. Section 4.6 presents goals and policies related to parks and open space. The section highlights the value of Courtenay's waterfront and river systems, the recreational and environmental importance of the natural and

[17] These budgeted amounts do not include a portion of corporate administration and overhead costs. Municipalities are not required to allocate these costs to individual services.

Service Element	Description
	open space systems, the need to distribute all classes of parks throughout the community, and the importance of protecting environmentally-sensitive areas. Sub-section 4.6.5 sets out a greenways strategy for the City. The strategy is designed to serve recreation, transportation and conservation functions, and is to be comprised of eleven individual greenways, all of which are identified as part of the City's long range plan.[18] • *Connecting Courtenay: Transportation Master Plan (2019)* — This *Master Plan* recommends a greenway planning initiative to identify greenway corridors.

Comments on the Service

The City of Courtenay Parks and Trails Service is significant in the number, breadth and combined size of parks and trails provided for the residents of Courtenay. According to the City's 2019 *Parks and Recreation Master Plan*, however, there is a need to establish new nature parks to protect natural habitats, and to make further progress in achieving goals related to the protection of important ecological assets. The *Master Plan* also identifies the need for more linear parks and extensions to existing trails. The desire for a greenway planning initiative is noted in the separate 2019 *Transportation Master Plan*.

As in all municipalities, funds available for new parks, trails and greenways are limited at the City of Courtenay. And, as in all jurisdictions, priorities identified for parks must compete for resources against equally legitimate needs in other areas of service — indoor recreation being a key example. The existing gaps in trails, greenways and natural areas highlighted in the City's service planning documents, and the desire for a new greenways initiative, could be explored collaboratively with other Comox Valley jurisdictions through a regional parks and greenways service that draws on the resources of the broader region, and that seeks to identify new funding opportunities.

TOWN OF COMOX PARKS AND GREENWAYS

Service Profile

The Town of Comox maintains and operates a system of 31 parks and greenways.

[18] At the time of writing (i.e., second half of 2021), Courtenay was in the process of updating its *Official Community Plan*. The draft version of the *Plan* expresses support for expanding existing natural areas and biodiversity corridors.

Figure 3.3
Comox Parks Service

Service Element	Description
Title	Town of Comox Parks Service
Service Area	Town of Comox
Scope of Service	The service includes the acquisition, development, regulation of use (*Bylaw 1881*), maintenance and operation of parks and greenways.
Types of Parks	Comox reports close to 140 ha of designated parks and public open space, including school fields owned by School District, and the Comox Golf Course. Parks that protect natural ecosystems, open spaces passive recreation (including trails) account for about 75% of this total. The remaining 25% features fields. The parks and greenways system consists of 25 parks, five greenways and one multi-use path. The following types of parks comprise the system: • neighbourhood parks with playgrounds, in place to serve individual neighbourhoods — examples include Anderton Park and Village Park • community parks, such as Salish Park and Filberg Park, which draw users from the municipality as a whole • greenways, including Cottonwood and Brooklyn Creek • nature parks, the best examples of which are Mack Laing Park, MacDonald Wood Park and the NE Woods.
Statistics on Use	None available.
Service Governance	Decisions on parks and trails are made by Town Council. Council is supported its Strategic Planning Committee (Committee of the Whole) and staff.
Service Delivery	Staff in the Town's Parks Department maintain all parks, playing fields, including greenways. Long-term planning for parks is addressed by Planning staff and Parks staff. The non-profit Filberg Lodge and Park Association operates Filberg Park; the non-profit Comox Golf Club operates the Comox Golf Course.
Service Funding	The Parks Department budget was $1.63 million in 2020, and $1.58 million in 2021. Operations are funded through the general municipal property value tax. Parkland is acquired using a variety of tools, including taxation, land dedication (development process), and land donation.

Service Element	Description
Service Plans & Strategies	The *Town of Comox Official Community Plan (2011)* is the policy document in place to guide investment in and the future development of the parks service. The OCP notes that there is "not an urgent need to acquire active recreation parks and open space in the Town". Priorities for the Town, instead, point to the acquisition of large natural forested parcels, environmentally sensitive area, and strategic greenway corridors. The desire to improve greenway connectivity within Comox, and to connect to the CVRD and Courtenay existing and planned greenway, is also noted. Specific objectives in the OCP call on the Town to: • develop a greenways network to encourage pedestrian activity and promote Comox as an environmentally friendly community • protect environmentally sensitive areas • encourage planting and retention of native species, and protect and enhance natural forest ecosystems Policies set out to help achieve the objectives speak to the acquisition and development of greenways and trails, and the "full achievement" of the trail network. The policies also highlight the desire to secure lands bordering Comox's waterfront for pedestrian access, the need to work with community organizations to acquire and manage lands, and the need to work with the K'ómoks First Nation on interpretive signage.

Comments on the Service

The Town of Comox provides a considerable number of parks and a range of park types to meet the needs and demands of Comox residents. According to staff, however, needs and demands for large forested areas, water access and protected ecosystems are not being fully met. Increased demands for connected greenways within the municipality, and between Comox and other jurisdictions, are also evident.

Comox has a small land base relative to that of other jurisdictions in the Comox Valley, and lacks significant new tracts of undeveloped natural landscapes to add to its local parks inventory. Residents who wish to access large, protected sites will increasingly need to look to sites outside of the municipality in the broader regional community. The Town's goals related to natural area and environmental protection, increased access to nature, and the linking of greenways may be best pursued, at least in part, through a regional parks and greenways service that includes the Town.

VILLAGE OF CUMBERLAND PARKS AND GREENWAYS
Service Profile
The Village of Cumberland acquires, develops, maintains and operates a system of 32 parks and greenways.

Figure 3.4
Cumberland Parks and Greenways Service

Service Element	Description
Title	Village of Cumberland Parks and Greenways Service
Service Area	Village of Cumberland
Scope of Service	The service includes the acquisition, planning, development, regulation of use (*Bylaw 840*), maintenance and operation of parks and greenways.
Types of Parks	The Parks and Greenways service includes close to 20 individual parks in six different park classes: • *Pocket Parks* — The smallest parks that provide open space and some recreational opportunities in established neighbourhoods. They may include picnic facilities or playgrounds, and they may feature public art or small stages. Examples include the Village Square and Postbox Garden. • *Neighbourhood Parks* — These parks provide active and passive recreation opportunities to residential neighbourhoods. Ulverston Station Park, Egremont Park and No. 6 Mine Heritage Park are examples. • *Community Parks* — Community parks typically provide a range facilities, including trails, picnic tables, sports fields and specialty attractions (e.g., water parks), but also have significant greenspace. They serve the entire municipality. Village Park is Cumberland's sole community park. • *Cumberland Regional Parks* — Cumberland's three "regional parks" are the Cumberland Community Forest Park (over 325 ha), Coal Creek Historic Park (40 ha), and Cumberland Lake Park (24 ha), which is located on Comox Lake in Electoral Area A of the CVRD, outside of the

Service Element	Description
	Village's boundary. These parks provide outdoor recreation opportunities to a large, regional population, and feature significant environmental assets. • *Greenways* — This category includes all developed trails within the Village, and includes the Ulverston Station Greenway and Wellington Colliery Railway Trail. • *Natural Resource Areas* — These parks protect environmentally sensitive areas but may also provide limited public asset. Hope Park is an example. Other natural areas are privately owned, including Maple Lake. The Village also owns 228 hectares of land in the Perseverance Creek watershed, acquired and managed to provide watershed protection, conservation and opportunities for low-impact recreation.
Statistics on Use	Data collected by the Village in 2019 and 2020 for Cumberland Lake Park showed that demand for access to the Park is high overall, and that considerable use comes from people in jurisdictions outside of Cumberland. Some highlights from the data are as follows: • demand for parking at Lake Park was over capacity on 18 days in from the beginning of June, 2020, to the end of September, 2020 — a 29% increase over 2019 • of the 93 private vehicle annual passes sold in 2020, 30% were sold to Cumberland residents, and 68% were sold to residents of the other Comox Valley jurisdictions • In 2019, 107 vehicle passes were sold, with 34% going to Cumberland residents, and 54% to residents from other parts of the Comox Valley The non-profit United Riders of Cumberland, in partnership with the Village, conducts surveys of trail users. Total usage of the trail network grew from approximately 95,000 visits in 2016 to 132,000 visits in 2019 — a 35% increase over four years.[19] Data show, as well, that about one-third of mountain bike riders reside in Cumberland, while 50% come from other parts of the Comox Valley.
Service Governance	Decisions on parks and trails are made by Village Council.

[19] More recent data have not been assessed to date; however, unofficial numbers indicate continued rapid growth in trail usage.

Service Element	Description
Service Delivery	Staff in Village's Parks and Recreation Department plan and manage the network of parks and greenways. The Village relies on non-profit societies to help develop, maintain and operate certain parks. For example: • United Riders of Cumberland, which maintains the trails in the Cumberland Community Forest (under contract to the Village), pursuant to a recreational trail land access agreements signed with the Village, TimberWest Forest Corporation, and Hancock Forest Management • Cumberland's Rotary Club assists with park maintenance of Rotary Orchard Park • the Comox Valley Disc Gold Club partners with the Village in maintaining the 18-hold disc golf course in Coal Creek Historic Park
Service Funding	The Parks operations budget was $0.38 million in 2020, and $0.37 million in 2021. Operations are funded through the general municipal property value tax. Parkland is acquired using a variety of tools, including taxation, land dedication (development process), and land donation. The Cumberland Forest Society has successfully raised funds in recent years for the acquisition of significant parcels to establish and expand the Cumberland Community Forest Park.
Service Plans & Strategies	There are two foundational documents in place to guide investments and actions related to parks: • *Village of Cumberland Official Community Plan (2014)* — The OCP is the Village's land use policy document to guide future planning and development. A section on Transportation and Connectivity contains policies to coordinate and interconnect recreation greenways with the overall transportation network of the community, but also the region. The section on Natural Environment stresses the need for environmental preservation in the Village and region, including through support for local and regional conservation strategies and cross-jurisdictional partnerships. Specific parks and greenways objectives are presented in the *Plan*. Parks, greenways, open spaces and recreational corridor systems are to be provided for all residents in a way that: – protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, environmentally sensitive areas, and the supply of ecosystem services – integrate with regional parks, open space and recreational corridor systems

Service Element	Description
	Polices on recreation seek to integrate the City's *Parks and Greenways Master Plan* (see later) with the CVRD's *Rural Comox Valley Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan*. • *Parks and Greenways Master Plan (2014)* — The *Master Plan* is a framework to guide the Village in the "identification, preservation, restoration, acquisition and management of significant parks, open spaces, and green corridors over the next 10 to 15 years". The *Plan* sets out the park classification system, presents an inventory of existing parks and greenways, and identifies gaps in the systems. Parkland acquisition tools are reviewed, and priorities for future acquisitions are listed. Lands with considerable environmental significance are listed as priority, as are land connections to promote trail and biodiversity corridors. A Parks and Greenways Master Plan Map of the desired future inventory of parks and network of greenways.

Comments on the Service

The Village of Cumberland places considerable value on parks that protect natural areas, habitats, biodiversity and sensitive ecosystems. Opportunities for connecting with nature are also important, as are nature-based outdoor recreation and the development of connected greenways.

The identification of "Cumberland Regional Parks" as a category in the Village's parkland inventory is apt given the parks' large sizes, Valley-wide usage, natural features and other characteristics that typically define regional parks. Staff report that while the Village may be amenable to some type of regional support for these parks in future planning exercises, the Village is more interested in seeing the establishment of new regional parks to meet the regional community's trail needs, to add opportunities for freshwater access, and to increase the amount and types of conservation areas in the Comox Valley. There is strong support, as well, for the creation of a regional greenways network into which Cumberland's' own greenways, and those of other jurisdictions, can connect.

CHAPTER 4
REGIONAL PARKS SERVICES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The *Regional Parks Background Study* is a research piece designed to help the CVRD and its member jurisdictions explore questions of service rationale, feasibility and structure related to a regional parks service for the Comox Valley. In any such study, a review of services in place elsewhere can be useful in helping decision-makers understand the opportunities available as well as the challenges to expect. To that end, Chapter 4 provides a comparative review of regional parks services in other regional districts.

Six regional districts with existing regional parks services in place were selected for the comparative review, including:

- Capital Regional District
- Cowichan Valley Regional District
- Regional District of Nanaimo
- Metro Vancouver
- Fraser Valley Regional District
- Regional District of Central Okanagan

Each of these regional districts, similar to the CVRD, is situated in a fast-growing part of British Columbia. Unlike the CVRD, however, each has had a regional parks service in place for several years — over 50 years in the case of Metro Vancouver — and, thus, has considerable experience from which decision makers in the Comox Valley may benefit.

Regional District Service Profiles

Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 beginning on the following page present detailed profiles of the individual regional district services. Figure 4.1 focuses on the two central Vancouver Island regional districts — the Regional Districts of Nanaimo and Cowichan Valley. Figure 4.2 reports on two metropolitan-area regional districts, namely the Capital Regional District and Metro Vancouver. Figure 4.3 profiles the services from the Fraser Valley and Central Okanagan. Observations and take-aways from the collection of services are provided following Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.1
Existing Regional Parks Services
Central Vancouver Island Regional Districts

	Cowichan Valley Regional District	Regional District of Nanaimo
Regional Population	91,000	172,000
Jurisdictions	Four (4) Municipalities Nine (9) Electoral Areas (including Islands)	Four (4) Municipalities Seven (7) Electoral Areas (including Islands)
Service Title	Regional Parks Service	Regional Parks and Trails Service
Service Definition	The service provides for the planning, acquisition, development, operation and regulation of regional parks and regional trails in the Cowichan Valley.	The RDN acquires lands, establishes regional parks and trails, and manages, regulates the use of, and operates them through the regional service.
Service Mandate	The *Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan* states that the purpose of the service is to "secure in perpetuity a network of Regional Parks and Trails to provide a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities, protect natural ecosystems, feature representative landscapes, link our communities and enhance livability". Objectives speak to the: • provision of outdoor recreation opportunities • conservation and protection of natural areas and geographic landscapes • desire to be regionally significant	As set out in the *Regional Parks and Trails Plan*, the service exists to: • secure, protect and steward land and water features of environmental significance and wildlife habitat value • provide rewarding outdoor recreation • foster education and appreciation of the region's natural environment • enhance livability for the current and future residents of the RDN
System Size & Diversity	The service contains eight (8) regional parks for a total of 823 ha. There are two (2) regional trails extending over 87 km. There is a goal to expand this network to 122 km through the development of the Cowichan Valley Trail.	The service features 11 regional parks, one (1) conservation area and 10 regional trails. The regional parks and conservation area total 2,100 ha in area, and range in size from 1 ha to 1,300 ha. The regional trails network is 78 km in length. There are four classes of regional parks:

	Cowichan Valley Regional District	Regional District of Nanaimo
	There are no separate classes of regional parks at present. There were 765,000 visits to the regional parks and trails in 2020.	• *Regional Conservation Area* — Protection of ecologically sensitive areas is paramount. Passive recreation is permitted but limited. • *Regional Natural Area* — Protect natural areas that are significant to the region. Provide outdoor activities. • *Regional Recreation Area* — Wide range of outdoor experiences, adventure activities and events. Accommodate relatively high number of visitors. • *Regional Trail* — Connect regional parks to one another, and to points of interest and communities.
Service Governance	Regional District Board. The Board is supported by the Regional Services Committee which is standing committee of the whole, focused on all region-wide services, including Regional Parks.	Regional District Board, supported by the Board's Regional Parks and Trails Select Committee, comprised of 14 Board Directors.
Service Delivery	Staff in the Parks Department plan, develop and operate the Regional Parks Service. Volunteers are used for specific projects and activities.	Staff in the Parks Services section of the Recreation and Parks Department plan, develop and operate the Regional Parks and Trails service. Contractors may be used for minor functions.
Service Funding	The service's 2021 operating budget is $1.34 million, almost all of which was funded by property value taxes requisitioned from member jurisdictions. An additional $0.75 million is collected (2021) under a Regional Parkland Acquisition service. These funds are raised as a separate property value tax, and are placed in an	The service's 2021 operating budget was $2.3 million. $1.8 million of the total was funded by property value taxes. An additional requisition of $1.4 million was collected using a combination of parcel taxes ($20 per parcel) and value taxes. Up to and including 2021, the property value tax

	Cowichan Valley Regional District	Regional District of Nanaimo
	Acquisition Fund. The full tax burden is allocated among member jurisdictions on the basis of converted assessment.	burden was allocated among jurisdictions on the basis of population. Effective 2022, the burden will be allocated on a combination of population (50%) and converted assessment (50%). Also starting in 2022, the RDN will eliminate the parcel tax and collect acquisition dollars using a value tax on the mixed population-assessment basis.
Parkland Acquisition	Lands to acquire are identified and classified as primary, secondary and tertiary sites based on the degree to which they are under pressure from development. Acquisition priorities are identified under the *Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan (2007)*. A new more current document is required to guide acquisition going forward. Lands are acquired using a range of methods, including property taxes and transfers from others.	Land acquisition criteria are in the process of being reassessed through the development of a new Regional Parks and Trails plan. To date, criteria have taken into account: • conservation value • recreational value • affordability • size • geographic equity • public interest • development pressure • priorities from past plans Lands are acquired using a range of methods, including property taxes and transfers from others
Taxes (2021) on Representative Home	Regional Parks Service — $32 Regional Parkland Acquisition Service — $18	Regional Parks and Trails Operations — $[to add] Parkland Acquisition (parcel tax) — $20
Strategies & Plans	The service is guided by the *Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan (2007)*. The regional district is intended to update this *Master Plan* in the near future.	The primary document in place to guide service decisions and expansion is the *Regional Parks and Trails Plan (2005-2015)*. This *Plan* is dated, and is in the process of being renewed. It is anticipated that the new plan will confirm the service's mandate, as identified earlier in this profile.

	Cowichan Valley Regional District	Regional District of Nanaimo
Challenges	The primary challenge facing the system is the absence of a current strategic plan and an acquisition strategy to guide expansion. Increasing land costs are also a challenge.	Equity among jurisdictions in acquisitions, development and spending is a significant concern in the RDN — more so than in some other regions. It took many years for the service to become a full region-wide service with all jurisdictions as participants. From 1989 to 2006, the service was sub-regional in nature with only the Electoral Areas as participants.

Figure 4.2
Existing Regional Parks Services
Regional Districts in the Province's Metropolitan Areas

	Capital Regional District	Metro Vancouver
Regional Population	425,000	2,581,000
Jurisdictions	Thirteen (13) Municipalities Three (3) Electoral Areas (including Islands)	Twenty two (22) Municipalities (incl. Bowen Island) One (1) Electoral Area (including Islands) One (1) Treaty First Nation
Service Title	Regional Parks Service	Regional Parks Service
Service Definition	Through the service, the CRD acquires lands, and establishes, develops, manages, and regulates the use of regional parks and greenways.	The service provides for the planning, acquisition, development, regulation and operation of regional parks and greenways throughout Metro Vancouver. The service also includes natural resource management, visitor services, nature education, interpretive programs and events.
Service Mandate	The service exists to: • protect, restore and connect the region's significant natural areas • provide opportunities for people to connect with nature • provide trails for commuting, recreation and wildlife Connections are a focus of the service. The CRD seeks to connect regional parks to other parks and trails, key points of interest and community facilities. The service embraces the concept that bigger natural areas are better, and connected natural areas are best. Also embraced is the	The service exists to conserve natural assets and connect people to nature. Ecosystem services and climate change mitigation are identified in the service's mandate, as are the importance of environmental education and stewardship, and the promotion of a sense of responsibility for, and connection to, natural setting. The service seeks to create and foster "a connected network of resilient regional parks and greenways that protects regionally important natural areas and connects people to them". Outdoor activity, enjoyment of natural spaces, access to nature and connection to nature for

	Capital Regional District	Metro Vancouver
	concept that "at least half of the land and water in the region be managed for the conservation of nature".	residents are identified as objectives of the service, but are secondary to natural area protection.
System Size & Diversity	The service features 31 regional parks, covering a total of 13,000 ha. The parks range in size from five (5) ha to 7,000 ha, and collectively contain 400 km of park trails. There are also three (3) regional trails that total 95 km in length. There are four park types, including wilderness areas, conservation areas, natural areas and recreation areas. There are also three trail types: bike and pedestrian, multi-use and hiking/walking. There were 8.5 million visits to the parks and trails in 2020 — an increase of 25% over 2019.	The service includes: • 23 regional parks • two (2) park reserves • two (2) ecological conservation areas • five (5) regional greenways In total, the service protects and manages an area that is 13,743 ha in size, with 350 km of trails. Regional parks range in size from 28 ha to 3,700 ha. Greenways are 0.8 ha to 39.6 ha. In 2020, there were 16.5 million visits to the system — a 38% increase from the 12.0 million in 2019.
Service Governance	Regional District Board, supported by a Regional Parks Committee — a standing committee of the Board. Board Directors and First Nation representatives may be appointed to the Committee.	Regional District Board, supported by a Regional Parks Committee — a standing committee of the Board, comprised of local elected officials from throughout the region (not only regional district directors).
Service Delivery	Service planning and operations are handled in-house by staff in the Regional Parks Department. Contractors are used for some maintenance tasks (e.g., washrooms).	Service planning and operations are handled in-house by staff in the Regional Parks Department. Contractors are used for some facility maintenance and non-core activities (e.g., campground). Staff are assisted in tasks such as habitat restoration and nature education by non-profit, park-specific Park Associations, of which there are seven (7). The Catch-Teach-Sustain Youth Society provides nature-focused and environmental

	Capital Regional District	Metro Vancouver
		stewardship programs. The Pacific Parklands Foundation is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the Regional Parks.
Service Funding	The service's 2021 operating budget is $12.4 million. Of this amount, $11.1 million is collected through property value taxes. An additional $4.0 million is collected separately for a Regional Parks Land Acquisition Fund. The full tax burden is allocated among member jurisdictions on the basis of converted assessment.	The service's 2021 operating budget is $54.6 million. Of this amount, $51.9 million is collected through property value taxes. The service's Parkland Acquisition and Development Reserve is funded through transfers from operating. The total transfer for 2021 is $15.6 million. The value tax burden is allocated among jurisdictions on the basis of converted assessment.
Parkland Acquisition	The Acquisition Fund was established in 2000 for ten years; it was renewed for two subsequent ten-year periods in 2010 and 2020. The CRD requisitions a separate, dedicated amount each year for the Fund (average of $21 per household in 2021). A Land Acquisition Strategy sets out principles and criteria to guide purchases. Criteria emphasize three themes: • environment • outdoor experiences and activities • management and planning Where possible, purchases are made in partnership with other orders of government, non-profit groups and others. The CRD aims to have contributions from others account for 25% of acquisitions (average).	The *Regional Park Land Acquisition 2050* document guides all acquisition in the service. Five strategies are outlined in the plan: • build a system that is resilient to impacts of climate change, land use change and growing visitation • facilitate a regional greenway system that connects natural areas and allows access • ensure a sustainable funding model • collaborate and partner with others • enable clear, efficient and flexible decision-making Acquisition criteria are set out under the fifth strategy. Additions to existing regional parks and greenways is the key criterion. Other criteria include level of threat, stewardship implications, "other" considerations, and partnerships.

	Capital Regional District	Metro Vancouver
Taxes (2021) on Representative Home	Regional Parks Service — $57 Parkland Acquisition Service — $21	Regional Parks Service — $45
Strategies & Plans	There are three key strategies and plans to guide the service: • *Regional Parks Strategic Plan (2012-21)* • *Land Acquisition Strategy (2020-21)* • *Regional Trails Management Plan (2016)*	There are three key strategies and plans to guide the service: • *Regional Parks Plan (2016)* • *Regional Greenways (2050)* • *Regional Parks Land Acquisition (2050)*
Challenges	Challenges include: • maintaining clarity on and support for the service's mandate • acquisitions in an environment of escalating land values	The primary challenges facing the system are: • rising land costs • significant increases in number of visits, and the resulting impacts on lands

Figure 4.3
Existing Regional Parks Services
Regional Districts in the Fraser Valley and Central Okanagan

	Fraser Valley Regional District	Regional District of Central Okanagan
Regional Population	180,000 (Regional Parks East) 155,000 (Regional Parks West) 335,000 (FVRD)	223,000
Jurisdictions	Regional Parks East — Five (5) Municipalities; Eight (8) Electoral Areas Regional Parks West: One (1) Municipality; Portion of one (1) Electoral Area	Four (4) Municipalities Two (2) Electoral Areas
Service Title	Regional Parks East Service Regional Parks West Service	Regional Parks Service
Service Definition	Both services provide for the planning, acquisition, development, regulation and operation of parks and trails.	RDCO plans, acquires, develops, regulates the use of, and operates the Regional District's system of regional parks and trails through the service. The service also features community relations and visitor services, which focus on programs to help residents learn about the natural and cultural heritage in the regional parks.
Service Mandate	As stated in the *Parks Strategic Plan (2014-24)*, the services exists to "provide diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation, protect and steward areas of cultural and ecological significance, and promote stronger connection between people and nature…". • In addition to recreation and ecological and cultural protection, objectives for the services speak to the desire for greenways to link regions and communities, and a	As set out in the *Regional Parks Service Review* (2020), the mandate of the service is "to establish and protect a network of regional parks and trails in perpetuity that represents and helps maintain the diverse range of natural environments in the Central Okanagan. It provides opportunities for outdoor experiences and activities that foster appreciation and enjoyment of, and respect for, the region's natural environments."

	Fraser Valley Regional District	Regional District of Central Okanagan
	desire to attract tourists in order to boost the economy.	Core values are listed — specifically, regional parks: • are inherently work preserving because of their environmental value • contribute to the overall well-being of the Central Okanagan community • must create opportunities for everyone to experience, learn about and enjoy parks
System Size & Diversity	Regional Parks East includes nine (9) regional parks and three (3) trails. Regional Parks East includes three (3) regional parks. The total size of both services is close to 2,000 ha with 22 km of regional trails. Individual parks range in size from 2.5 ha to 1,470 ha. There are three types of regional parks: • recreation areas • natural areas • regional trails and greenways In 2020, there were 1.5 million visits to the two regional parks services combined. This number represented a 30% increase from 2019.	The service protects and manages: • 30 regional parks and trails, totalling over 2,100 ha The regional parks are classified as follows: • conservation parks • natural parks • recreation / cultural / waterfront parks • trails (greenways) In 2018 there were 845,000 visits to the regional parks. No data were collected in 2020
Service Governance	Regional District Board. The Board is supported by the Regional and Corporate Services Committee, which is the 12-member executive committee of the Board.	Regional District Board, supported by the Board's Governance and Services Committee (committee of the whole).
Service Delivery	Staff in the Parks Department plan, regulate and operate the service.	Staff in the Parks Department deliver the service. Some specialty tasks — e.g., turf maintenance, arboriculture — are contracted to third parties.

	Fraser Valley Regional District	Regional District of Central Okanagan
Service Funding	Regional Parks East's 2020 operating budget was $1.6 million, $1.1 million of which was requisitioned from member jurisdictions through a property value tax. Regional Parks West's 2020 operation budget was $1.3 million. $1.2 million of this total was requisitioned as a property value tax from Abbotsford and a portion of Area G (the two participating jurisdictions). Minimal amounts are transferred every year to land acquisition reserves.	The service's 2021 budget is $8.5 million, $8.2 million of which is recovered from property value taxes. The value tax burden is allocated among jurisdictions on the basis of converted assessment. Approximately half of all tax revenue is transferred to Park Land Reserve and Capital Facility Reserve (for development).
Parkland Acquisition	There are no acquisition strategies in place, but there are some criteria that are used to guide acquisitions: • regional significance (accessible to all, public interest, contribution to healthy living, unique experience) • recreational opportunities • ecosystem protection • project feasibility and management Some land in the system is owned by the FVRD; much, however, is owned through partnership agreements or is leased.	RDCO is in the processing of renewing its *Ten Year Park Land Acquisition Strategy (2007-2017)*. Priorities set out under the former strategy focused on: • biogeoclimatic zone gaps • regional trails / greenways • regionally significant interests (cultural, geography/vegetation, recreation, natural landscapes, conservation)
Taxes (2021) on Representative Home	n/a	Regional Parks Service — $96
Strategies & Plans	The service is guided by the *Regional Parks Strategic Plan (2014)*.	The following strategies and plans guide decisions:

	Fraser Valley Regional District	Regional District of Central Okanagan
		• *Regional Parks and Greenways Plan for the Central Okanagan (2008-2020)* • *Ten Year Park Land Acquisition Strategy (2007-2017)* • *Regional Parks Service Review (2020)*
Challenges	Challenges include: • limited land acquisition reserves • rising land costs • increasing visitor numbers and growing expectations	The challenges are similar to those in other regional districts: • rising land costs • development pressures

Observations on the Services

The profiles of the six existing regional parks services show that while each service has some unique features that set it apart from the others, there are a number of features that are common to all of the services. The observations presented in this section of the chapter focus on these common features. Eight observations in total are put forward for the consideration of decision-makers. All of the observations are based on the information in the profiles, but also draw on discussions that were held with managers in the different regional districts.

The eight observations are as follows:

- *Ecosystem Protection and Access to Nature* — To varying degrees, all of the regional parks services draw attention in the services' mandates to the importance of outdoor recreation. The services are focused primarily, however, on the protection of natural environments. Regional parks exist first and foremost in these regional districts to protect regionally-significant ecosystems and natural areas, and to provide opportunities for people to connect with nature.

- *Greenways* — All of the services highlight the importance of, and the need for, regional greenways. In some cases greenways are presented as wildlife and biodiversity corridors. In most cases, however, greenways are

promoted for use by residents, including commuters. Greenways as a key component of active transportation networks are prominent in regional parks services.

- *Cultural Heritage* — Regional parks services are evolving to give greater emphasis to First Nations' culture and heritage in acquisition strategies, and in park development and operation.

- *Strong Demand* — All regional districts that track visitor numbers to regional parks report significant increases in regional park use. The large spikes in visitor numbers recorded in 2020 are believed to be driven by COVID-19 and the associated restrictions on indoor gatherings. Steady increases in visitor numbers were recorded for many years, however, prior to the pandemic.

- *Full Participation* — With the exception of the Fraser Valley Regional District's service, all of the regional parks services reviewed in this chapter feature full participation by their member jurisdictions, including all islands that exist as separate local jurisdictions, or that form part of other jurisdictions. The public good nature of regional parks, coupled with their broad indirect benefits, provide a strong rationale for full participation. Services with established regional parks or planned regional parks in every local jurisdiction provide an even stronger rationale.

- *Funding for Acquisitions* — Regional districts have found that taxes earmarked for land acquisition and park development tend to face less opposition than taxes collected for operations. Regional districts have also found that dedicated acquisition reserves, backed by strong long-term acquisition strategies, are critical tools to have in place. Without them, acquisition does not happen as quickly or at all.

- *Acquisition Methods* — Direct purchase remains an important and, in some cases, preferred method of acquisition in all services. Rising land costs and ambitious acquisition plans, however, make it impossible for regional districts to rely on direct purchases as the only — or even the primary — acquisition tool. Developer contributions, development cost charges, long-term leases, rights of way, joint purchases and other methods are all needed.

- *Existing Parks with Regional Park Features* — Some jurisdictions in regional districts will have municipal or electoral area parks that have regional park characteristics. Several of the parks in the Comox Valley's local jurisdictions illustrate this point. Regional districts often come under pressure from individual jurisdictions to take responsibility for local parks that could be considered regional in nature. In general, regional districts opt

to not accept responsibility except in extreme cases — for example, if a regionally-significant ecosystem within a such a park is at risk. The preferred strategy is to acquire and provide new parks, over and above existing local ones.

CHAPTER 5
SERVICE MODEL OPTIONS

If the Comox Valley local government jurisdictions choose to collaborate in the establishment and provision of a regional parks service, decision-makers will need to consider and address a number of questions related to different service elements, or service "building blocks". The four most important building blocks and their associated questions are as follows:

- *Service Definition* — What would be the purpose of the service, and what exactly would be the scope of the new service, both in terms of activities undertaken (e.g., acquisition, operation and maintenance, regulation of use, environmental education), and of types of regional parks to include (e.g., conservation areas, greenways, recreation parks)?

- *Service Participation* — Which jurisdictions would participate in the service? What would be the service area?

- *Service Governance* — Who would be involved in making decisions for the service?

- *Service Finance* — How would costs related to acquisition and development be recovered? How about operating costs? How would the tax burden associated with the service be allocated among participating jurisdictions?

This chapter explores each of the building blocks and its associated questions, beginning with service definition. Options to examine under each block are put forward based on the research conducted on regional parks services in other regional districts, interviews with Working Group members and the CAOs, and the consultant's own judgement and experience. The options are assessed against evaluation criteria — one set of criteria per building block — to help craft a proposed service model for the consideration of Comox Valley local governments.

The number of options presented and assessed under each building block, it should be noted, is limited to two discrete alternatives. The purpose of identifying options is to give decision-makers a sense of the spectrum of approaches available, not to present a definitive list of possibilities from which to choose.

SERVICE DEFINITION

Every regional district service has a specific definition to articulate the purpose of the service. Every service also has a scope of activities that is undertaken through and funded by the service. In the case of regional parks, scope may also include the types of regional parks to be provided. Figure 5.1 presents two definitions to consider for a Comox Valley Regional Parks Service.

Figure 5.1
Service Definition Options

Service Definition	
Option 1: Regional Greenways Service	**Option 2: Regional Parks Service**
A CVRD Regional Greenways Service would exist to provide a network of greenways throughout the Comox Valley to encourage and facilitate: > the movement of people, using a range of active transportation means, between communities, existing destination parks, recreation facilities and other points of interest > access to and connection with nature > the protection of sensitive/valued environmental features, including riverbanks and shorelines > wildlife movement through protected corridors A range of activities would be undertaken through the service, including network planning, the acquisition of lands and rights-of-way, the development of trails suitable for active transportation, the regulation of use, and necessary repairs and maintenance. As stipulated in its establishing bylaw, the Regional Greenways Service would be limited to greenways and related linear parklands.	A CVRD Regional Parks Service would exist to: > protect regionally-important ecosystems and natural features > create and provide access to large, destination nature parks with trails, water access and other opportunities for people to connect with and be active in nature > provide a network of greenways throughout the Comox Valley to connect communities and points of interests, encourage active transportation, and allow for the movement of wildlife The same range of activities featured in the Regional Greenways Service (Option 1) would be undertaken through the Regional Parks Service, namely: planning (system and individual parks), acquisition, development, regulation and maintenance. The distinguishing feature in this option is the full range of regional park types, including conservation areas, nature parks, recreation parks and greenways.

Evaluation Criteria

Four evaluation criteria are put forward to assess the two options for the definition building block:

- *High (Perceived) Level of Support from Jurisdictions* — The discussions with individual Working Group members, the Working Group as a whole, the Chief Administrative Officers in the region, and other local government staff provided some insight into the degree to which each of the options may be supported by local government decision-makers. The preferred option may be the one with the highest (perceived) level of support.[20]

- *Modeled on Success in Other Regional Districts* — The preferred model may be one that is modeled on, and that attempts to emulate, successful models in other regional districts.

- *Complements Existing Local Services* — Regional parks services are intended to complement, rather than replace or duplicate, services that are in place to meet the local parks needs of individual jurisdictions. Accordingly, the preferred regional park service option may be the one that is designed specifically to address regional needs that local services do not exist to meet.

- *Demanded by Residents Across the Region* — The preferred option may be the one that is perceived to be in most demand by residents across the broader region. Potential demand levels were determined based on consultations with the Working Group and CAOs, along with a review of all usage data available.

Figure 5.2 presents an assessment of the two options against the four evaluation criteria.

Figure 5.2
Evaluation Against the Criteria

	Options on Service Definition	
Evaluation Criteria	**Regional Greenways Service**	**Regional Parks Service**
High (Perceived) Support from Local	In the consultation for the study, greenways that link communities, existing destination	It is apparent from the consultations and research that local service gaps extend beyond

[20] The Study's terms of reference did not provide for consultation with elected officials or residents.

	Options on Service Definition	
Evaluation Criteria	**Regional Greenways Service**	**Regional Parks Service**
Jurisdictions	parks and key points of interest were identified as a service gap in all local jurisdictions. It is also clear from the local parks and planning materials that active transportation within and between communities is a shared need. For these reasons, a new regional district service with a limited mandate and scope, focused on the provision of new regional greenways and the connection of existing local greenways, may earn broad support.	greenways to include significant environmental features and sensitive ecosystems that individual jurisdictions are able to address on their own. A broader mandate and scope that include the provision of regional nature and other parks may address these gaps. Such a service may also allow all parties to feel that they "get something" — that is, to pursue not only common objectives, but also objectives that may be more important to individual places.
Modeled on Successes Elsewhere	Regional greenways are a feature of all services in the comparison group. The desire to expand and add greenways is also a common feature. None of the researched services, however, has the provision of greenways as its sole purpose.	All regional parks services in the comparison group feature a full scope of activities and park types. It is the case, however, that the purpose and scope of at least some of the services expanded over time in response to opportunities and changing needs. At least some of the services started with a more limited mandate and scope of activities.
Complements Existing Local Services	All of the local parks and trails services in the Comox Valley speak to the importance of greenways and the desire to expand and connect local networks with those of neighbouring jurisdictions. It is not clear, however, if a regional parks service is the only — or the preferred — way to connect local networks. Inter-jurisdictional implementation agreements may be an	Some of the existing Comox Valley local parks and trails attract users from outside of the host jurisdiction; however, local services are focused on meeting the host jurisdiction's needs for local parks and trails. All local services seek to protect additional ecosystems and natural areas. The emphasis in municipalities, however, is on active outdoor recreation, which would be different than the

	Options on Service Definition	
Evaluation Criteria	**Regional Greenways Service**	**Regional Parks Service**
	additional option to consider.	focus of a Regional Parks Service.
Demanded by Residents Across the Region	Citing surveys and anecdotal data, staff from the Comox Valley local governments note that demand for trails and existing greenways is significant. Public consultation undertaken as part of recent local planning exercises (e.g., Courtenay, Electoral Areas) also points to high demand for active transportation options and greenways.	Demand across region for large nature parks, for destination parks with water access, and for greenways is perceived by staff in all jurisdictions to be significant.[21] There is significant, widespread awareness of the environmental, climate and health benefits associated with protecting ecosystems, preserving large parts of the nature, and being active in nature. Based on experiences in more populated regions, local governments in the Comox Valley can expect demand to increase for large protected natural areas and greenways as population and development in the Comox Valley increase.

Conclusion

Based on the assessment of the service definition options, there is a strong case to be made for a regional park service that focuses on the creation of large regional nature parks to protect sensitive ecosystems and natural areas. There is also, however, a case to be made for a regional greenways service. Decision makers may wish to consider the establishment of a regional parks service to protect regionally-significant natural areas, and to provide a network of regional greenways.

- *Protection of Natural Areas* — The protection, in perpetuity, of regionally-significant natural areas throughout the Comox Valley would be the service's primary purpose. Such areas would include sensitive ecosystems,

[21] The widespread perception of high demand is supported by sizable increases in visitation numbers in regional parks services in other regional districts, coupled with higher use of local park systems and destination parks in the Comox Valley.

aquatic and upland habitat corridors, estuaries and foreshores, and other areas that would be identified through a science-based approach for their high conservation value. Trails and other low-impact works would be developed in the regional parks to provide opportunities for people to connect with and enjoy nature.

- *Provision of Regional Greenways* — Regional greenways would be developed as off-road linear parks with multi-use trails. As a general rule, they would provide the principal linkages between communities throughout the Comox Valley; however, they could also enable residents to access significant parkland and natural areas, and other points of interest. The regional greenways would connect to the local greenway and active transportation corridors of the CVRD's member jurisdictions.

SERVICE PARTICIPATION

There is no requirement on the part of municipalities or electoral areas in the Comox Valley to collaborate in the establishment and provision of a regional parks and/or greenways service through the regional district. Local jurisdictions that wish to capture the benefits associated with regional parks may choose to work together and participate in a new service; alternatively, jurisdictions may choose to focus their efforts and limited resources on meeting local parks and recreation needs. Figure 5.3 presents two participation scenarios to consider.

Figure 5.3
Service Participation Options

Service Participation	
Option 1: Full Participation	**Option 2: Sub-Regional Service**
All municipalities and electoral areas in the Comox Valley would choose under this option to collaborate in the establishment and provision of a regional parks and/or greenways service through the regional district. The choice of each jurisdiction to participate in the new service would reflect the shared view that residents in all jurisdictions benefit from investments made to protect regionally-significant natural areas and establish greenways connections between communities.	Participation under this option would be limited to jurisdictions that seek the benefits of regional parks and greenways, and are willing to contribute financially to the acquisition of lands and operation of a service. The option assumes less-than-full participation at the outset of a new service. Over time, participation could expand to include others (as has happened in some regional district park services elsewhere).

Service Participation	
Option 1: Full Participation	**Option 2: Sub-Regional Service**
The full participation option assumes that all jurisdictions value the benefits associated with regional parks and greenways, and hold the same values related to the protection of regionally-significant ecosystems, access to nature, and the importance of greenway corridors. The inability under the *Local Government Act* of jurisdictions to withdraw from a regional parks service means that the full participation option assumes (and requires) that jurisdictions have a sufficient level of trust and confidence in one another, and in the regional district.	

Evaluation Criteria

Five evaluation criteria are used to assess the two options for the service participation building block:

- *Promotes Inter-Jurisdictional Equity* — The preferred model may be one in which the service participating area is the same as the service benefitting area — put differently, the one in which jurisdictions that benefit from the service are also participants in the service.

- *Modeled on Success in Elsewhere* — The preferred model may be one that is modeled on, and that attempts to emulate, successful models in other regional districts with regional parks services.

- *Avoids Gaps in Planning, Acquisition and Operation* — Gaps in the service area may leave key, regionally-significant ecosystems and natural assets unprotected, and could make it impossible to create a regional greenways network. Accordingly, the preferred model may be one in which gaps are limited or non-existent.

- *Maximizes Assessment Base* — The presence of a large assessment base to fund acquisitions and operation may point to the preferred option.

- *Strong and Unified Voice to Advocate for the Region* — Regional parks and greenways services often require

contributions in the form of leases, rights-of-way, and acquisition dollars from other orders of governments, private corporations and non-governmental groups. The preferred option may the one that allows for the strongest Comox Valley voice to advocate on behalf of the region for these resources.

Figure 5.4 presents an evaluation of the options against the criteria.

Figure 5.4
Evaluation Against the Criteria

	Options on Service Participation	
Evaluation Criteria	**Full Participation**	**Sub-Regional Service**
Promotes Inter-Jurisdictional Equity	Regional parks services provide both direct benefits and indirect benefits to participating jurisdictions and residents: > *Direct Benefits* — Jurisdictions benefit directly when investments are made to acquire and protect natural areas and provide active transportation greenways in the specific jurisdictions. Residents benefit directly when they use the parks and greenways provided by the service. > *Indirect Benefits* — Investments in regional parks and — to a lesser extent — greenways also provide benefits in the form of ecosystem services, environmental protection, public health, community and economic development, and habitat protection. These benefits are indirect in character, experienced by	The strongest indirect benefits are associated with regional parks services that set out to acquire and protect large natural areas and regionally significant ecosystems, and to provide sizable destination parks including those with water access. Investments in greenways provide considerable direct benefit to the jurisdictions in which they are made, and to residents who use them. These investments provide, however, a lower level of indirect benefit relative to that associated with investments in natural area protection. Greenways are intended, first and foremost, to be used by people for transportation and recreation. Benefit comes from direct use. Less-than-full participation would not promote inter-jurisdictional equity in a regional parks

	Options on Service Participation	
Evaluation Criteria	**Full Participation**	**Sub-Regional Service**
	all jurisdictions and residents in the Comox Valley simply by virtue of being part of the Valley. The benefits are not dependent on a jurisdiction's decision to participate in the service, or on its level of investment. In every regional district service, inter-jurisdictional equity is highest when the service's benefitting area — that is, the area over which direct and indirect benefits are spread — matches the service participating area. In the case of a regional parks service that exists, in whole or in part, to protect significant regional ecosystems and natural areas, the benefitting area is arguably the entire region. Full participation in such a service would provide the highest level of inter-jurisdictional benefit. Equity would be strengthened further if direct investments by the service were spread across the region.	service that included natural area protection in its mandate. Non-participating jurisdictions in this situation would receive indirect benefits paid for by others. The non-participants would also receive direct benefits for free every time their residents made use of the parks. Less-than-full participation would be less inequitable in a regional service focused solely on greenways, provided that jurisdictions with regionally-supported greenways chose to participate. These findings apply to Denman and Hornby Islands as well as to other full jurisdictions that may decline to participate. Exclusion of the Islands from a service focused on natural area protection could be viewed as inequitable. In each of the regional parks services in other regional districts profiled for this study (see Chapter 4), islands are included in the participating area.
Modeled on Successes Elsewhere	Five of the six regional parks services profiled for the study feature full participation. The sole exception is the service in the Fraser Valley Regional District which excludes the City of Abbotsford.[22]	With the exception of the FVRD's Regional Parks (East) Service, none of the services profiled is sub-regional in nature. In at least three of the cases, however, the services began as sub-regional services with less than full

[22] For many years, beginning well before the creation of the FVRD, Abbotsford belonged to the Metro Vancouver Regional Parks Service. Metro transferred ownership over its Abbotsford-based regional parks in 2016 when Abbotsford was forced out of the Metro Vancouver

	Options on Service Participation	
Evaluation Criteria	**Full Participation**	**Sub-Regional Service**
	Four regional districts — namely, the CRD, Metro Vancouver, Regional District of Nanaimo, and the Cowichan Valley Regional District — include various islands. In all cases, the islands are contained within the regional parks services' participating areas.	participation. Specifically, the services in Metro Vancouver, the Regional District of Nanaimo and the Cowichan Valley Regional District began as sub-regional coalitions of willing member jurisdictions. Over time, each service expanded in participation to become truly regional.
Avoid Gaps in Planning, Acquisition and Operation	In a true regional service, with participation from all member jurisdictions, a regional parks strategy can be developed by and for the entire regional district at the outset of the service. Such a strategy would address planning, acquisition, development and operational goals without gaps. In the development of the strategy and in the ongoing administration of the service, the interests of individual jurisdictions and the regional community as a whole would be taken into account.	In terms of land area, the Comox Valley Regional District is the smallest regional district in British Columbia. In this setting, the absence of individual jurisdictions from a regional parks and greenways service could result in significant gaps in protected areas and/or greenway connections.
Maximizes Assessment Base	Services with full participation are able to access the full regional tax base to help pay for acquisition, planning, development, operation and other functions. All things being equal, the larger the assessment base, the greater the financial strength of the service.	The absence of jurisdictions from a service's participating area would limit the service's ability to raise funds needed for all functions, including acquisition. The actual financial impact would depend on which jurisdictions chose to not participate. The absence of jurisdictions with relatively large assessment

service. Abbotsford owns and maintains these parks using funds raised by the FVRD from Abbotsford taxpayers and a small portion of Electoral Area G. Abbotsford is not, however, part of the FVRD Regional Parks (East) Service to which all other jurisdictions belong.

	Options on Service Participation	
Evaluation Criteria	**Full Participation**	**Sub-Regional Service**
	Full participation also allows a service to maximize revenues from non-tax sources, such as development cost charges (DCCs). These sources help to limit the tax requisitions imposed on participating jurisdictions.	bases (e.g., Courtenay, Electoral Area C, Comox) would be felt more acutely than the absence of others.
Strong and Unified Voice to Advocate for the Region	Efforts to advocate on behalf of the Comox Valley for support from the provincial and federal governments, private corporations and others would be most forceful and effective with full participation. Advocacy for regional parks support may be particularly important in the Comox Valley where opportunities for Crown land transfers are few and far-between, and where the cost of land is rising quickly. Acquisitions without the support of others are challenging already; they would become more so in the coming years.	Advocacy efforts undertaken for services with less-than-full participation would lack, by definition, the force of the full regional community. In some cases, such efforts may also conflict or compete with the efforts of non-participants for limited resources.

Conclusion

It is clear from the assessment of the options that the full participation of all jurisdictions in the service, including the Islands in Electoral Area A, is the preferred model. Less-than-full participation — i.e., the sub-regional service option — would result in inequities among jurisdictions and potential gaps in regional parks and greenways systems. The full regional assessment base would not be a feature of this option, nor would a strong regional voice in advocacy efforts.

Full participation is the preferred option that all local governments in the Comox Valley may wish to consider. A sub-regional approach featuring a coalition of the willing could be feasible depending on the jurisdictions included, and the degree of likelihood that full participation would occur over time.

SERVICE GOVERNANCE

The governance structure for a regional district service identifies the parties that are involved in making decisions for the service, and the decision-making processes to be followed. Service participants may choose to follow the default service governance model set out in the *Local Government Act*; alternatively, they may use the authority under the *Act* to design a custom approach. Figure 5.5 presents two options for decision makers to consider. Both options in the figure, along with any other options that may be designed by participants, are based on two important assumptions:

- *Public Involvement* — In any governance model, residents in the participating jurisdictions would be included in the development of a strategy for the service, as well as in identifying service priorities on a regular basis.

- *K'ómoks First Nation* — Regular engagement with the K'ómoks First Nation would be an expectation under all governance models. The service would exist on the unceded, traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation. The K'ómoks First Nation would be needed to help identify areas of cultural and environmental significance that may be protected through a regional parks service (depending on the service's mandate and scope).

Figure 5.5
Service Governance Options

Service Governance	
Option 1: Regional District Board	**Option 2: Regional Parks Service Committee**
Decision-making for the service would occur using the default structure set out in the *Local Government Act*. Accordingly: > The CVRD Board of Directors would make all decisions for the service. > Decisions on land acquisition, service budgets and regional park regulations would be made by the full Board of Directors using corporate weighted or unweighted votes (depending on the matter under consideration).	The Board could create an advisory committee to oversee, and provide recommendations to the Board on, the service. The members of the Regional Parks Service Committee would include at least one representative from each participating jurisdiction — larger jurisdictions would be expected to have more than one representative. Special voting rules could be developed to require super-majorities on particular matters, such as those related to land acquisition and service budgets. It is important to note, however, that the voting rules at the Committee level would only govern the Committee's decisions on recommendations to

Service Governance	
Option 1: Regional District Board	**Option 2: Regional Parks Service Committee**
> Decisions to guide ongoing operations and policy would be made by Directors from participating jurisdictions only, using stakeholder votes. (If all jurisdictions participated in the service, the full Board would make these decisions.)	make to the Board. All final decisions for the service, including on land acquisitions and budgets, would be made by the Board and could not be delegated to the Committee. The Board's decisions would be informed by the Committee's recommendations; however, the Board would not be bound by them.

Evaluation Criteria

Four evaluation criteria are used to assess the options identified for the service governance building block:

- *Familiar and Comfortable with Proposed Structure* — Some regional districts have experimented with and are comfortable with service governance models that depart from the *Local Government Act* default. Other regional districts prefer to govern services using the standard structure. The preferred model for a Comox Valley service may be the one with which the CVRD is most familiar and comfortable.

- *Modeled on Success in Other Regional Districts* — The preferred model may be one that is modeled on, and that attempts to emulate, successful models in other regional districts with regional parks services.

- *Voting Can Be Customized to Account for Needs* — The success of a regional district service may depend on the ability of the service's governance model to accommodate all needs. To the extent that such needs cannot be addressed through the default structure, a new customized model may be required.

- *Decisions are Made in a Separate Forum* — The preferred model may be that which allows important matters for the service to be studied, discussed and debated in a forum other than the Board of Directors.

Figure 5.6 presents an evaluation of the options against the four evaluation criteria.

Figure 5.6
Evaluation Against the Criteria

	Options on Service Governance	
Evaluation Criteria	**Regional District Board**	**Regional Parks Service Committee**
Familiar and Comfortable with the Proposed Structure	The CVRD Board uses the standard *Local Government Act* service governance model for several services. The Board uses a Committee of the Whole to explore service-related matters, and to recommend decisions to the Board.	The CVRD has an Electoral Areas Services Committee and a Committee of the Whole.[23] None of the Committees currently has a customized voting structure. All voting follows the default provisions of the *Local Government Act*.
Modeled on Successes Elsewhere	Each of the comparison regional districts relies on the legislative default model featuring the Board of Directors to make regional park service decisions.	Three of the six boards have created service-specific standing (advisory) Regional Parks Services Committees of elected officials to study matters and make recommendations. Two of the remaining three make use of a multi-service regional services committee. The RDCO uses the committee of the whole approach.
Voting can be Customized to Account for Needs	Changes to the *Local Government Act* in the early 2000's gave regional districts the ability to customize, to some degree, voting rules for stakeholder decisions. The number of representatives from each jurisdiction involved in making administration and policy decisions could be varied from the default; so, too, could the method of allocating votes. A desire for super-majorities, however, could not be	Voting at the committee level may be customized to accommodate the needs and concerns of participating jurisdictions. Rules could be developed to create the need for super-majorities on key (or all) matters, including the acquisitions of lands and the development of service budgets. As noted earlier, however, the voting rules at the Committee level would only govern the

[23] The CVRD Water Committee is established as a Commission.

	Options on Service Governance	
Evaluation Criteria	**Regional District Board**	**Regional Parks Service Committee**
	accommodated.	Committee's decisions on recommendations to make to the Board. All final decisions for the service, including on land acquisitions and budgets, would be made by the Board and could not be delegated to the Committee. The Board's decisions would be informed by the Committee's recommendations; however, the Board would not be bound by them.
Decisions are Made in a Separate Forum	All decisions would be made by the Board of Directors at the Board table.	The Committee would be focused solely on the regional parks service. Many decisions and all recommendations would be made in a separate forum dedicated to the service.

Conclusion

Based on the assessment of the service governance options, decision-makers may wish to consider using the Regional Parks Service Committee model. Reliance on a committee, despite its decision-making limitations, may be able to best address concerns some jurisdictions may have related to control over key funding decisions.

SERVICE FUNDING

Decision-makers would have a number of decisions to make with respect to service funding. Specifically, decision-makers would need to determine how to recover costs incurred to provide the service, and how to allocate any value tax burden that is incurred. Funding assumptions made to simplify the assessment in this study are as follows:

- regional park service operations would be funded primarily using property taxes
- acquisitions would be supported by taxes, contributions made through the planning process, development cost charges, and agreements with other order of governments and other organizations

- the property tax component would be comprised entirely of property value taxes — property parcel taxes, which are considered less equitable than value taxes, would not be supported[24]
- the service establishing bylaw would limit on the size of property tax requisition that is imposed on participants, and the rate of requisition growth
- in-kind contributions from volunteers would be over-and-above the tax requisition, as would be operating and planning grants

Cost Recovery Options

Regional districts with regional parks services incur capital costs related to land acquisition and development, and operating costs related to maintenance, regulation and — where offered — visitor services and education. Most regional districts separate capital cost recovery from operating cost recovery in order to provide greater transparency in service funding decisions, and to safeguard earmarked acquisition resources. Figure 5.7 presents two options on cost recovery that speak to the separation of capital and operating funds.

Figure 5.7
Service Funding (Cost Recovery) Options

Service Funding (Cost Recovery)	
Option 1: Single Tax Requisition	**Option 2: Separate Tax Requisitions**
Under this option, the CVRD would recover both capital and operating costs using a single property value tax requisition. Any separation of the funds collected into capital and operating budgets would be made by Board policy.	The CVRD under this option would recover service operating costs using a tax requisition issue through the regional parks service. The regional district would separately requisition capital funds for acquisition and development using a separate regional parks and greenways acquisition and development service. This separate service, it should be emphasized, would be established solely for the purpose of requisitioning and spending capital funds required for the regional parks and greenways system. The requisition capital costs raised through the separate service would appear as its own line item on tax notices.

[24] The Regional District of Nanaimo uses property parcel taxes to raise funds for the regional parks service (specifically, for acquisitions). The RDN is in the process, however, of ending its reliance on parcel taxes in favour of property value taxes.

Cost Recovery Evaluation Criteria

There are three evaluation criteria against which to assess the cost recovery options:

- *Modeled on Success in Other Regional Districts* — The preferred model may be one that is modeled on, and that attempts to emulate, successful models in other regional districts with regional parks services.

- *Provides Flexibility for Decision-Makers* — Opportunities may arise in regional parks services to acquire targeted properties, or to apply for capital grants that require matching regional district funds. Similarly, unforeseen needs may arise that required scare resources to address. In these types of cases, decision-makers may benefit from some level of flexibility in the ability to use funds.

- *Provides Funding Certainty and Stability* — The preferred model may be one that ensures that funds raised for certain purposes are collected on an ongoing basis, are safeguarded, and are available when needed.

Figure 5.8 presents an assessment of the two cost recovery options against the criteria.

Figure 5.8
Evaluation Against the Criteria

	Options on Service Funding (Cost Recovery)	
Evaluation Criteria	**Single Tax Requisition**	**Separate Tax Requisitions**
Modeled on Successes Elsewhere	The Capital Regional District, Metro Vancouver and the Regional District of Central Okanagan use a single tax requisition to raise funds for capital and operating needs. In each case, a portion of the requisitioned funds is assigned to a separate acquisition / capital reserve fund by Board policy.	The Regional Districts of Nanaimo, Cowichan Valley and Fraser Valley requisition for acquisition and development costs separately from operating costs. In each case, a separate service has been established.
Provides Flexibility for Decision-Makers	Funds raised through a single requisition would be contained within a single service and could,	Funds could not be moved from operations to capital, or *vice versa*, under this model since the

	Options on Service Funding (Cost Recovery)	
Evaluation Criteria	**Single Tax Requisition**	**Separate Tax Requisitions**
	therefore, be moved between operations and capital uses to meet changing needs and capture opportunities that arose. The movement of funds within the service would be constrained by the service budget and any Board policies on the use of funds. The budget and policies could, however, be altered by the Board relatively easily if deemed necessary.	funds would be collected through, and reside within, different regional district services. Within the acquisition/capital fund, decision-makers would have the freedom to assign funds to meet opportunities or needs that arose.
Provides Funding Certainty and Stability for Service	Overall funding for the service would be certain and stable, subject only to major Board-determined changes in the annual financial plan. The embedding of acquisition and capital funds in a single service requisition would allow funds identified for acquisition to be used for operations, perhaps to avoid the need for a tax increase. This feature could result in some vulnerability, particularly related to funding for future acquisitions.	Funds for operations, requisitioned through the primary regional parks service, would be both certain and stable, subject only to major changes to the financial plan. Funding for acquisition and capital, collected through their own separate service, would also be both certain and stable subject to Board-determined budget changes. The use of a separate requisition for acquisition and capital may be an effective way to highlight and build support for land acquisition and the expansion of a regional parks and greenways system.

Tax Burden Allocation Options

Figure 5.9 presents two options for allocating the value tax burden among participating jurisdictions.

Figure 5.9
Service Funding (Tax Burden Allocation) Options

Service Funding (Tax Burden Allocation)	
Option 1: Converted Assessment	**Option 2: Converted Assessment and Population**
The property value tax burden would be allocated on the basis of converted assessment under this option. Each participating jurisdiction, therefore, would pay towards the service based on the size of its converted assessment base, relative to the total converted assessment base of the service area. Converted assessment is the default tax burden allocation method under the *Local Government Act*. The method is considered particularly equitable and appropriate for public good services that have broad indirect benefits.	The property value tax burden would be allocated under this option on a combination of converted assessment (50%) and population (50%). This option would reflect the service's broad, indirect benefit; it would also, however, reflect the direct benefit that is associated with use of regional parks and greenways by residents. Population would be a proxy measure for actual use by residents of each participating jurisdiction.

Tax Burden Allocation Evaluation Criteria

There are three evaluation criteria against which to assess the two options:

- *Familiar to CVRD and Participating Jurisdictions* — The preferred option may be the one that allocates the tax burden on a basis, or combination of bases, that jurisdictions understand and have used.
- *Modeled on Successes elsewhere* — The preferred model may be one that is modeled on, and that attempts to emulate, successful models in other regional districts with regional parks services.
- *Reflects Benefits of the Service* — The preferred model may be the one that best reflects the full range of benefits, including both the indirect and direct benefits.

Figure 5.10 evaluates the two options against the criteria.

Figure 5.10
Evaluation Against the Criteria

	Options on Service Funding (Value Tax Burden Allocation)	
Evaluation Criteria	**Converted Assessment**	**Converted Assessment & Population**
Familiar and Comfortable with the Proposed Structure	Converted assessment, as the legislative default approach, is used by most regional districts in British Columbia for most if not all services. The CVRD uses the approach for some regional and sub-regional services, and is therefore familiar and comfortable with it.	The combination of converted assessment and population is not presently used by the CVRD as the basis of cost allocation for any of its services. The regional district does not rely entirely, however, on the legislative default approach to requisition funds. For services such as regional sewer and regional water, the CVRD makes use of different factors to allocate the total required tax requisition among jurisdictions.
Modeled on Successes Elsewhere	Five of the six regional parks services profiled for the study allocate the full value tax burden, including the amounts required for acquisition, development and operation, on the basis of converted assessment.	The Regional District of Nanaimo allocates its full regional parks tax burden, for acquisition, development and operation, using the 50-50 combination of converted assessment and population.
Reflects Benefits of Service	Converted assessment reflects the broad indirect benefits — environmental protection, ecosystem services, public health, economic and community development — associated with the service. Converted assessment is less reflective, however, of the direct benefits that come with usage of the parks.	This approach's inclusion of converted assessment reflects the broad public good benefits. The model's inclusion of population reflects — albeit imperfectly — the direct benefits that come with usage (population is a proxy measure for actual usage in the model).

Conclusions

The assessment of the cost-recovery options highlights the potential value of having two separate requisitions — and, thus, two separate services — including one for operating costs, and one solely for acquisition and development capital costs. The Regional District could achieve this separation, however, by placing a portion of requisitioned funds into an acquisition reserve. A single requisition is recommended as the preferred option.

The assessment of the tax burden allocation options highlights the rationale for hybrid converted assessment (50%) and population (50%) approach that would capture both the broad indirect and the direct benefits associated with the service. The approach is not common, however, in regional parks services. Allocation on the basis of converted assessment solely reflects most strongly the broad public benefit association with the service.

CHAPTER 6
RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

SUMMARY

The *Regional Parks Background Study* was commissioned as a research piece designed to help the CVRD and its member jurisdictions understand:

- the nature and attributes of regional parks systems as they exist across British Columbia
- regional parks service models in place in other regional districts
- potential rationales for a regional parks service in the CVRD
- service model options that may be suited to the Comox Valley, given the existing community parks services in the region, the perceived need to protect regionally-significant lands, current opportunities for action, and the challenges facing the parties

This *Report* has presented the findings from the *Background Study*. Chapter 2 of the report introduced regional parks and regional parks services. The defining characteristics and benefits of regional parks were outlined along with the various reasons that tend to drive the establishment of regional parks services in regional districts. The past and potential future of regional parks in the Comox Valley were reviewed. The interests of the CVRD and its member municipalities in the potential establishment of a new regional parks service were explored.

Chapter 3 focused on the local, community parks services that exist in the Comox Valley today. Profiles of each service were presented to help identify the types of parks and greenways that are in place across the region, and to understand the types that are not in place. The profiles showed that while all local services provide an impressive number and range of parks and trails to their local communities, there may be the need for new conservation parks to protect sensitive ecosystems, new nature parks that provide opportunities for people to connect with nature, and a regional greenways network to connect existing local greenways, communities and points of interest throughout the Comox Valley.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of a comparative review of existing regional parks services in six regional districts, including three on Vancouver Island, two in the Lower Mainland and one in the Okanagan. Observations provided at the end of the chapter highlighted — among other points — the services' focus on ecosystem protection and access to nature, the importance of greenways, strong demand on the part of residents for regional parks, the benefits of full

participation in services, and importance of dedicated funds for land acquisition.

Chapter 5 identified and explored service model options related to service definition, service participation, service governance and service finance — the four main building blocks of every regional district service. Two options under each building block were assessed against a set of evaluation criteria. The results of the assessment pointed to specific options that decision-makers may wish to consider in structuring a regional parks service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the assessment in Chapter 5 form the basis of recommendations to Comox Valley local governments. The recommendations do not, it should be emphasized, speak to the question of whether local governments should establish a new regional parks service; nor do the recommendations presume that decision-makers will choose to proceed with service establishment. The recommendations are provided simply to help guide decision-makers' efforts in the event that they decide to explore the establishment of a regional parks service further.

Recommendations on Service Definition

In the event that Comox Valley local governments choose to establish a regional parks service, the following recommendations are made on service definition:

- THAT the local governments of the Comox Valley consider establishing a regional parks service that focuses, primarily, on the acquisition and protection of regionally-significant natural areas throughout the Comox Valley, and, additionally, on the provision of regional greenways

- THAT the local governments of the Comox Valley begin a regional parks strategic planning process aimed at defining the full mandate and scope of the new service, identifying the types of regional parks to establish, and setting long-term goals and a corresponding timeline for service expansion

Recommendation on Service Participation

In the event that Comox Valley local governments choose to establish a regional parks service, the following recommendation is made on service participation:

- THAT the local governments of the Comox Valley work to secure the participation of all Comox Valley local government jurisdictions in the regional parks service

To secure full participation, decision-makers may need to incorporate safeguards into the service establishing bylaw, including limits on property tax requisitions, and a statement on service definition to identify activities that would not be undertaken through the service.

Recommendation on Service Governance

In the event that Comox Valley local governments choose to establish a regional parks service, the following recommendation is made on service governance:

- THAT the local governments of the Comox Valley consider endorsing the use of a regional parks service committee, with customized voting rules, to oversee and provide recommendations to the board on the service

Recommendations of Service Funding

In the event that Comox Valley local governments choose to establish a regional parks service, the following recommendations are made on service funding:

- THAT the local governments of the Comox Valley direct the CVRD, through the service establishing bylaw, to recover the property tax-supported costs of the service using a single requisition, a portion of which would be allocated to a reserve fund dedicated to land acquisition and development

- THAT the local governments of the Comox Valley direct the CVRD, through the service establishing bylaw, to allocate the property value tax burden, associated with operating and capital costs, on the basis of converted assessment