

4.1 Parks and Open Space

INTRODUCTION

Lands set aside for recreation and active transportation in the Plan Area include the Regional District's regional and community parks and trails, provincial parks, and federal fisheries lands on the Big Qualicum River and at Horne Lake. These are shown on Map No. 3 Community Resources. This section focuses primarily on parks for public use, and Section 2.1 of this Plan addresses sensitive ecosystem protection.

There are extensive trail networks on Crown lands and Private Managed Forest Land in the Plan Area; however, their long-term protection is not guaranteed. The Regional District does not have the resources to consider managing informal trail systems on Crown lands, but support them through mapping, and by working with community groups with interest in trail building and marketing. Private Managed Forest Lands are not considered publicly accessible, however, historic use of logging roads and trails for recreation in these areas is common, but since the tenure is private, there is no guarantee for ongoing protection.

There is a sports field at the Lions Community Hall property. Henry Morgan Park near the Bowser Village Centre includes a playground, shelter and washroom. Dunsmuir Community Park has a small tennis court and basketball half-court, and at the time of updating this Plan in 2016, there were plans for improvements to this park in the near future.

There are numerous unconstructed road rights-of-way in the Plan Area, some of which were dedicated in the past for highway plans that never came to fruition. These rights-of-ways are assets for future trail construction and are an integral part of Regional District trail and active transportation planning.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE POLICIES

1. Parkland shall be permitted in all land use designations.
2. The designation of Parkland may also protect those lands that are noted as environmentally sensitive in the Plan Area.
3. This Plan designates all Provincial/Crown lands above known unconfined aquifers as Park Lands to protect finite groundwater resources into the future.
4. This Plan designates Department of Fisheries and Ocean owned properties along the Big Qualicum River, at Horne Lake, and that part Block 40, plan 1339R, Alberni Land

OBJECTIVES

1. *Ensure* that parks and recreational uses form an integral part of the community infrastructure.
2. *Recognize* the importance of regionally significant parks and natural features
3. *Support* the parkland acquisition strategies of the Regional District's Regional Parks and Trails Plan and the Community Parks and Trails Strategy
4. *Support* public open space opportunities on Provincial, Federal, and Regional District lands.
5. *Improve* public beach access to and linear recreational connections along creeks and river corridors as well as waterfront areas.
6. *Identify, maintain and improve* wildlife corridors.
7. *Maintain* close cooperation with public and private institutions to encourage institutional uses such as schools, community halls, the E&N Rail Corridor, and associated open space as an integral part of the community parks and open space system and where possible, available for public use.
8. *Encourage* the availability of the area's forest lands for recreational enjoyment and education while safeguarding recreational appeal.

District as Park Land to protect this important river and regional park area.

5. Pursuant to the *Local Government Act*, at the time of subdivision the Regional District shall determine whether the owner of land being subdivided shall:
 - a. provide without compensation, useable park land equivalent to 5% of the parcel size and in a location acceptable to the Regional District Board, or
 - b. pay to the Regional District an amount that equals the market value of the land that may be required for park purposes, or
 - c. provide a combination of land and cash to the satisfaction of the Regional District Board.
6. Known priorities and criteria for park acquisition must be considered and given priority at the time of park dedication such as those indicated in this Plan or by any other Plan of the Regional District such as the Community Parks and Trails Strategy, the Regional Parks and Trails Plan, or Active Transportation Plan. At the time of adoption of this Official Community Plan, key priorities for parkland acquisition and development in the Plan Area include:
 - a. “Olympic Torch Relay Trail” that would connect the Lighthouse Country Regional Trail through Bowser Village Centre;
 - b. Historic Horne Lake Trail;
 - c. Trails in Oakdowne Park through License of Occupation with the Province;
 - d. Connection between the Bowser Elementary at the end of Faye Road and the Thompson Clark Ocean Trail Community Trail via unconstructed Jackrabbit Road;
 - e. Those identified in Sensitive Ecosystem Policy 8 of this Plan; and
 - f. Those identified in Goal 4.1 of Schedule B, the Bowser Village Centre Plan.
7. The Regional District will not support encroachment applications into rights of way to beach areas, the foreshore, streams, or watercourses in the Plan Area.
8. When responding to referrals from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure for road closure applications, the Regional District will:
 - a. consider the value of retaining the right-of-way as public land for recreation and active transportation purposes;
 - b. refer to its parks and trails plans and strategies, and
 - c. not support the closure if retaining the right-of-way as public land will benefit parks and trail development or active transportation.
9. This Plan supports the creation of a parks development cost charge bylaw to support acquisition and development of select park amenities.
10. The Regional District recognizes that public involvement is essential in the planning, acquisition, and development of the community and regional parks. Consultation with the public, as well as parks and recreation commissions, volunteer groups and service organizations is encouraged and is considered vital for the success of the Parks System.

ADVOCACY POLICIES

11. The Regional District shall support the Province in the designation and protection of candidate areas identified through the BC Protected Areas Strategy Process. The Provincial Government has included an expansion of Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park and an ecologically sensitive wetland known as “Gainsburg Swamp” west of Deep Bay as candidates for its Protected Areas Strategy.
12. The Regional District shall encourage management of Crown lands as Parks/Reserve or BC Forest Recreation sites south and west of Bowser along Nile Creek, Thames Creek, Lymn/Chef Creek, Gainsburg Swamp, Annie’s Woods and the unconfined aquifer on Crown Land in District Lot 86 (see Map No. 2).
13. The Regional District shall encourage the Province and forest companies to protect the natural woodlands and landscape features of the area and provide opportunities for controlled use of trails and private logging roads during non-operation periods for outdoor recreation except during times of high and extreme fire hazard.
14. The Regional District shall encourage appropriate agencies to allow public access or use of corridors intended as public utility rights-of-way or transportation corridors.
15. The Regional District shall encourage and support volunteer assistance in the development and management of community parks, Streamkeeper projects and trails.
16. Partnerships among residents, landowners, business owners, and government agencies to improve Park Lands are encouraged and supported by this Plan.

NOTE FOR DRAFT: Still trying to get a response from BC Parks about the relevance of policy 11. The new Protected Areas Strategy released in last 2016 is very un-specific and doesn't identify these locations for expansion.