

*Cowichan Valley Regional District*



*Regional Parks & Trails  
Master Plan*

Prepared by Lanarc Consultants Ltd.

Prepared for CVRD Parks

March 2007



## *Acknowledgements*

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The CVRD Regional Parks & Trails Advisory Group has also provided direct and meaningful input into the development of this plan. This Advisory Group includes:

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## *Executive Summary*

Since the Regional Parks function was established in 1972, the Cowichan Valley Regional District has explored various options for implementing a Regional Parks vision. In recent years the District's Regional Parks Program has focused on the development and management of the Cowichan Valley Trail initiative.

In 2005 the CVRD Board initiated the process to prepare an updated Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan to define the direction, policies, priorities and actions for the Regional Parks Program over the next 10 to 15 years (2007-2022).

The Regional Board retained Lanarc Consultants Ltd. to work with the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group, CVRD Parks staff and residents across the Region to develop a viable plan. The detailed recommendations and action plans outlined in the Master Plan respond to the following vision adopted by the Regional Board in October 2006:

*"The people of the Cowichan Regional value and wish 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 within the Region."*

This vision was crafted by the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group and is based on input received as part of the extensive public consultation process in preparing the plan. The planning team worked together with the public to identify goals, define future Regional Park and Trail acquisition priorities, explore park management options and provide recommendations for funding. The Master Plan is a compilation of this process.

Based on the adopted vision, community consultation and stakeholder input, the Master Plan outlines a Regional Parks and Trails strategy, which proposes ten (10) new Regional Parks, reclassification of an existing park and extensions to the existing Cowichan Valley Trail initiative. The recommended sites for acquisition as Regional Parks are:

- Bald Mountain Peninsula
- Cobble Hill Mountain/Bamberton Quarry
- Malahat-Spectacle, Oliphant Lakes and Mt. Jeffery
- Stoney Hill/Samson Narrows

- Chemainus River Corridor and Estuary
- Heart and Stocking Lake Uplands
- Ladysmith Harbour Islands
- Cowichan Lake Waterfront Site
- Somenos Marsh
- Mt. Whympere, Landale, El Capitan and Lomas Lake
- Osborne Bay Park (*reclassification of this existing park*)

The Plan recommends acquisition of each of the proposed regional park sites as individual opportunities arise; however, the Plan also highlights sites for primary, secondary and tertiary acquisition consideration in recognition of limited resources the Regional District may have to apply at any one time and the influences of potential land use changes on sites proposed.

Strategic funding options for acquisition of proposed regional park sites and the ongoing management of amenities are recommended. The Plan suggests a variety of funding mechanisms to achieve the vision, goals and objective of the Plan. Included among these recommendations is a proposal to establish a Regional Parkland Acquisition Fund.

Completion of the Plan's vision will secure a system of Regional Parks and Trails as a lasting legacy for the use, enjoyment and environmental stewardship of these special places by those presently residing within and future generations of the Cowichan Region.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) is well known for its environmental and cultural diversity. While much of the Regional District remains rural, population growth and development pressures have had noticeable impacts through changes on the landscape. Existing parks and trails at the community level provide local public recreation opportunities and environmental protection. On the other hand, many significant and favoured informal sites valued by the public for outdoor recreation are located on privately owned lands subject to potential land use change. There remains, therefore, the issue of uncertainty over continued public access to these private lands in the future if access limitations or restrictions were to be imposed by individual landowners.

Over the past number of years, the pace of land use change has continued to accelerate throughout the Cowichan Region. With this change, many treasured recreational landscapes have been, or are about to be transformed. Recognizing the need to secure significant spaces in the public interest, the CVRD Board initiated the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan process to guide acquisition and management of regionally significant lands of high outdoor recreational and environmental value to the Regional community.

### 1.1 What are Regional Parks & Trails?

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A Regional Park or Trail is one that is acquired, developed and managed under the Regional Parks Program administered by the Cowichan Valley Regional District. This system is financially supported by all nine electoral areas and four municipalities within the Region. In British Columbia, Regional Districts have been providing regional park services since the 1960s. Regional parks typically encompass larger land areas of regional interest for outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship values and may be more complex than the local community parks provided and maintained by individual municipalities or electoral areas.

The Cowichan Regional Parks and Trails function is separate and distinct from the community parks programs currently provided within the electoral areas and municipalities of the CVRD. Regional Parks and Trails are intended to coordinate, complement and enhance the parks and protected areas programs managed by all levels of government – regional electoral areas, municipalities, Provincial and Federal. In summary, Regional Parks are established for all residents of the CVRD for the benefit of the entire Cowichan Region.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan

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Since the Regional Parks function was established in 1972, the CVRD has explored various options for implementing a Regional Parks vision. Over the past few years the Regional Parks Program in the CVRD has focused on the planning, land acquisition and development of the Cowichan Valley Trail. The Cowichan Valley Trail (CVT) is a 140 km trail initiative, that when completed, will link with the Galloping Goose Regional Trail in the Capital Regional District and the Nanaimo Regional District's segment of the Trans Canada Trail on Southern Vancouver Island.

Going beyond the directive to complete this significant regional trail initiative, the Cowichan Valley Regional Board decided to revisit the broader concept of a Regional Parks Program through completion of an updated Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.

In the fall of 2005, the CVRD began to develop an updated Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan based on the following mandate of the Cowichan Valley Regional Board:

*"To prepare a Regional Parks and Trails Plan that will define the future direction, policies, priorities and actions for the Cowichan Valley Regional District. The Regional Parks and Trails Plan is a strategic plan that will provide the basic framework to define and guide a Regional Parks and Trails Program for the Cowichan Valley over the next 10-15 years (2007-2022)."*

Specifically, the purpose of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan is to:

- Define the role of Regional Parks and Trails within the CVRD;
- Establish a vision and philosophy of the mandate and future needs of Regional Parks within the CVRD;
- Identify sites and corridors of 'regional interest' for Regional Park and Regional Trail acquisition;
- Provide direction on land management and relationships with provincial legislation, community parks and trails, municipal agreements and park zoning;
- Provide direction on Regional Parks funding levels and sources, including opportunities for alternative or unique parkland acquisition strategies; and
- Present a Regional Parks and Trails implementation strategy for the Cowichan Region.

### 1.3 Background Information

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The Cowichan Valley Regional District has long recognized the importance of protecting significant landscapes, and several studies on Regional Parks have been undertaken in the past. These studies provide a base of information and verification of continued public interest for development of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.

#### *Resolution on Greenbelt & Regional District Priorities (1975)*

The Resolution on Greenbelt & Regional District Priorities report addressed the desire to define the CVRD's Regional Park function. It was written as a guide to forming Regional Park policy and puts forth steps for implementing regional parks priorities. The report also compiled a list of areas to be considered for regional park acquisition.

#### *PERC Report (1985)*

The 1985 study was prepared by Professional Environmental Resource Consultants (PERC) for the CVRD Board with the goals of improving coordination of public leisure services in the Cowichan Valley, enhancing services in the Regional Parks system and studying the tax base for funding services equitably for all residents in the Cowichan Region. The report detailed recommendations on funding community and regional parks, maintenance, new facilities, and facility issues. However, this report did not assess a framework for the orderly execution of regional park acquisition and development.

#### *Regional Parks Study (1992)*

CVRD Development Services completed a Regional Parks Study to provide direction to the Cowichan Valley Regional Board on goals and priorities for a Regional Parks system. The study executed a public survey questionnaire to determine community support for a Regional Parks system and made recommendations on parks and areas warranting consideration for regional park status.

Questionnaire results indicated that CVRD residents were largely in favour of a recommitment to the Regional Parks function, and subsequently the Cowichan Valley Regional Board directed the Regional Parks function to focus on acquisition and development of the 140 kilometre Cowichan Valley Trail (the CVRD's contribution to the 16,000 kilometre 'coast to coast' Trans Canada Trail route across Canada).

### *Other Studies*

Other studies and reports were reviewed to gather background information:

- Cobble Hill Mountain Recreation Area Management Plan (2003);
- Ladysmith Parks and Greenspace (excerpts);
- Cowichan Region Economic Development Commission (2002);
- Cowichan Valley Regional District By-Law 271: A bylaw to establish a reserve fund for Regional Park Capital Projects; and
- Trail Network and Cycling Plan (2000).

The substance of the background reports demonstrates a long-term interest in the creation of a comprehensive Regional Parks and Trails system within the Cowichan Region.

## 2.0 The Plan Development Process

The CVRD retained Lanarc Consultants Ltd. to work with the CVRD Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group, CVRD Parks staff and residents across the Region to develop a viable plan. The planning process worked to identify goals, define future acquisition priorities, explore park management options and provide recommendations for funding. This plan is a compilation of the process and describes a Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan that has been developed in four stages:

1. Analysis of the Current System
2. Outreach – Gauging the Demand
3. Development and Review of the Draft Plan
4. Finalizing the Plan

### 2.1 Analysis of the Current System

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The initial review of the Regional Park system included the following steps:

- Assessed existing local park facilities and operations, current issues and general public perceptions of the existing Regional Parks system within the CVRD;
- Reviewed the roles of Regional Parks to understand the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities, protection of environmental features and regionally significant sites in relation to wildlife species and habitat, population growth and land use trends in the CVRD, economic generation and tourism, watershed and riparian area protection and other types of parks in the CVRD (i.e. community parks, Provincial Parks and Federal Parks);
- Looked at current trends in the CVRD and Canada-wide in terms of need for parks and outdoor recreation spaces;
- Assessed/reviewed existing Regional Parks and Trails, and identified gaps and opportunities for linkages with other park systems; and
- Reviewed and discussed issues with the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group and CVRD Parks staff to understand key parks issues and need for improvements, and begin to develop a future vision for Regional Parks and Trails in the CVRD.

## 2.2 Outreach – Gauging the Demand

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Using a variety of techniques, the consultants focused on gaining insight and ideas from the public, community organizations and member municipalities and other relevant stakeholder agencies within the CVRD.

### *Public Information Meetings – Spring 2006*

Consultation with stakeholder groups and residents across the Region defined the CVRD's future vision, policies, priorities and actions for regionally significant parks and trails in the Cowichan Region.

Public meetings were held across the Region in March/April 2006:

- West Sector (Cowichan Lake Recreation Centre);
- South Sector (Kerry Park Recreation Centre);
- East Sector (Cowichan Centre); and
- North Sector (Ladysmith Secondary School).

The first round of Public Information meetings provided:

- A presentation on the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan process and an open question period;
- An interactive mapping session with open house participants to identify potential regionally significant sites for consideration in the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan; and
- An opportunity for the public to share ideas and opinions on Regional Parks and Trails.

The results of the Spring 2006 Public Open House meetings are summarized in Appendix C.

### *Region-Wide CVRD Residential Household Survey*

A region wide survey on regional parks issues and interests using the **Total Design Survey** method was undertaken during the spring of 2006. This survey was sent to 1000 randomly selected households and provided statistically valid results on opinions of residents across the Cowichan Region. The survey questionnaire is included as Appendix A and its key findings are summarized in Section 5.1 of this report.

Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants (PERC) undertook the survey design and implementation with input on the survey question design and content from CVRD parks staff and the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group.

Objectives of the Region-Wide Household survey:

- Gauge current household use of parks and trails;
- Identify opportunities to improve the existing Regional Parks and Trails system;
- Gauge future needs and desires by identifying where and what type of regional park/trail facilities and services residents would like to see; and
- Provide input on the role Regional Parks and Trails should contribute to individual residents and the regional community.

The survey questionnaire is included as Appendix A and key findings are summarized in Section 5.1.

### *Stakeholder Consultation*

Stakeholder organizations were contacted directly to request input into the Regional Parks and Trails Planning process. Interviews were arranged with organization representatives (where possible small groups with similar interests) to discuss organizations' interests and issues related to the development of a Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan. Details of stakeholder consultations are included as Appendix G.

### *Public Information Meetings – Fall 2006*

A second series of public meetings were held during October/November 2006 at venues within the four sectors of the Region. The second round of Public Information meetings provided:

- A presentation of the input and feedback from the spring public consultation sessions, the region-wide sample survey results, and stakeholder consultations; and
- An opportunity for further public input in developing the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.

The results of these meetings are summarized in Appendix F.

### *CVRD Website*

Information updates on the Regional Parks and Trail Master Plan process were made available on the CVRD website together with an on-line public feedback form.

## **2.3 Development and Review of the Draft Plan**

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With the completion of the consultation activities and review of public and stakeholder input, a Draft Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan was prepared incorporating the information presented and supported by the public. Draft recommendations were reviewed:

- By the CVRD Board;
- By the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group; and
- By stakeholder groups, including: Member Municipalities, First Nations, Provincial Agencies, Federal Agencies, Neighbouring Regional Districts and Land Trust Agencies.

## 2.4 Finalizing the Plan

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Compilation of the Final Plan was completed for review and consideration for approval by the CVRD Regional Services Committee and Board in January, 2007.

## 2.5 Adoption of the Plan

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The Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan was formally adopted by the Regional Board by Bylaw in January 2007.

## *3.0 Exploring the Current Parks System*

The following section describes existing parks and trails located in the Cowichan Region.

### *3.1 Existing/Current Regional Parks and Trails in the CVRD*

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#### *The Cowichan Valley Trail (CVT)*

The Cowichan Valley Trail (CVT) is the Cowichan Region's contribution towards completion of the Trans Canada Trail route on Southern Vancouver Island. The development of this trail has been a priority under the CVRD Regional Parks and Trails function.

The section of CVT currently managed by CVRD Parks follows the abandoned CNR line from Sooke Lake Road, near Shawnigan Lake, to the Deerholme Wye in Glenora. The trail continues on the western CNR line including sections through Cowichan River Provincial Park to the Town of Lake Cowichan. Completion of the 140 km trail initiative is expected to take several years and will link communities throughout the Region. Plans are to connect the CVT with the Galloping Goose Regional Trail in the Capital Regional District (CRD) and with the Trans Canada Trail in the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN).

#### *Sandy Pool Regional Park*

Sandy Pool Regional Park is a 36-acre (14.6 hectare) park located on the Cowichan River off Riverbottom Road. The Regional District acquired the Regional Park in 1984 to provide public access to the Cowichan River for swimming, fishing and water-based recreation (i.e.: tubing/kayaking).

This Regional Park is bounded by Cowichan River Provincial Park to the west and south, and the Tsa'lam Reserve to the east.

#### *Osborne Bay Park*

The 61.7 acre (25 hectare) park was acquired by the Regional District in the late 1990's. At the time the CVRD did not have an established Regional Park operations program and agreed to transfer the operational responsibility for the park to the Municipality of North Cowichan under a long-term lease agreement.

## 3.2 Other Types of Parks & Trails in the CVRD

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### *Electoral Area Community Parks*

Electoral Area community parks are funded and developed separately within each of the nine electoral areas and provide a range of amenities, including trail systems, tot lots, boat launches, beach areas and athletic fields. There are over 100 community parks across the nine electoral areas covering over 270 hectares of land. More community parks are being acquired and developed every year as these communities grow in population.

Electoral Area Community Park sites are acquired through a variety of means, including:

- Dedication during land rezoning or subdivision;
- Purchase; or
- Land donation or gifting.

Electoral Area Community Parks are managed by the Regional District Community Parks function, which includes involvement of non-elected Parks Commissions appointed by the CVRD Board.

### *Municipal Parks*

Each of the four municipalities within the Region has its own municipal parks program:

- The Municipality of North Cowichan has more than 20 municipal parks. This parks system includes sports fields, lake and ocean beach facilities, nature trails and playgrounds.
- The City of Duncan maintains park areas along the Cowichan River, Centennial Park near the city centre, neighbourhood tot lots and smaller parks.
- The Town of Ladysmith has over 20 municipal parks, including sports fields, a public par-3 golf course, playgrounds, neighbourhood parks, waterfront trails and nature trails.
- The Town of Lake Cowichan has three municipal parks providing an outdoor stage, playgrounds, picnic facilities and swimming beaches. The westernmost “terminus trailhead” of the Trans Canada Trail (Cowichan Valley Trail) is also located within the town boundary.

### *Provincial Parks*

BC Parks is responsible for the designation, management and conservation of a system of provincial parks and recreation areas located throughout the province. These contain many of the best

representative elements and special features of British Columbia's natural heritage. In the Cowichan Region there are eleven provincial parks.

The current directive of the provincial parks program in the Cowichan Region is limited to completing outstanding land acquisitions for the Cowichan River and Gordon Bay Provincial Parks. In 2001, BC Parks initiated steps to close public access to Spectacle Lake, Chemainus River and Memory Island Provincial Parks due to lack of Provincial funding to operate these sites. In response to these pending closures the CVRD agreed to take on the operation of these three Provincial park sites with local funding provided by the local community parks function in Electoral Areas A, B, E and F.

### *National Parks*

National parks are established by the federal government to protect outstanding representative examples of natural landscapes. National parks are found in each of Canada's 39 natural regions.

Within the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Parks Canada manages Pacific Rim National Park Reserve that extends along the west side of Vancouver Island from Bamfield to Port Renfrew. The entire Pacific coastal boundary of the Regional District falls within Pacific Rim National Park Reserve from Nitinat Lake to Port San Juan. The National Park Reserve is renowned for its temperate rain forests, rocky cliffs and Pacific Ocean shoreline through which the West Coast Trail traverses 77 km from Bamfield to Port Renfrew.

## **3.3 Other Protected Areas Designated within the Regional District**

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### *Municipal Forest Reserves*

Located in the Municipality of North Cowichan and established in 1946 by an act of Municipal Council, the North Cowichan Municipal Forest Reserve:

- Includes six major landholdings encompassing land area on: Mount Prevost, Mount Sicker, Mount Tzouhalem, Stony Hill, Mount Richards and Maple Mountain.
- Covers approximately 5,000 hectares of land (25% of the area of North Cowichan).
- Is managed for multiple uses including: outdoor recreation, forest education, domestic water supply, visual landscape, economic development and revenue generation through forestry and silviculture activities.

### *Ecological Reserves*

Ecological Reserves are areas in British Columbia selected to preserve representative and special natural ecosystems, plant and animal species, features and phenomena. The key role of ecological reserves is to contribute to the maintenance of biological diversity and the protection of genetic materials. Scientific research is one of the principle uses of ecological reserves in British Columbia. In the Cowichan Valley Regional District seven Ecological Reserves have been set aside:

- Mount Tzouhalem Ecological Wildflower Reserve;
- Nitinat Lake Ecological Reserve;
- Honeymoon Bay Ecological Reserve;
- Ladysmith Bay Ecological Reserve;
- Woodley Range Ecological Reserve;
- Rose Inlet Ecological Reserve; and
- Canoe Islet Ecological Reserve.

Ecological Reserves are not created for outdoor recreation, however most are open to the public for passive recreation such as hiking and nature watching.

### *Protected Open Space*

Certain open spaces with important outdoor recreational and/or ecological values are secured through non-park agencies, private institutions or non-profit organizations. Examples of such initiatives with the Cowichan Region include:

- Cowichan Bay Estuary Management Area Plan – The plan recognizes the estuary’s important estuarine habitat for wintering and migrant waterfowl as well as its connection to the Koksilah and Cowichan Rivers that are spawning habitat for Chinook, Coho and Chum salmon and Steelhead trout. The estuary is regulated under the multi-jurisdictional Cowichan Bay Estuary Management Plan.
- Somenos Marsh – The marsh is protected for its exceptional wildlife, wetland and fisheries values, biodiversity and rare and endangered species protection. Somenos Marsh is managed and protected by a partnership between Ducks Unlimited Canada, The Nature Trust of BC, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, BC Parks, Cowichan Tribes, The Municipality of North Cowichan, BC Forest Discovery Centre and the Cowichan Watershed Council.

### 3.4 Private Land

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Frequently, informal outdoor recreation occurs on undeveloped private lands. Approximately 61% of all the land in the CVRD is privately owned and recreational users of these lands may be unaware that the lands are private.



## 4.0 Regional Context

The Cowichan Valley Regional District is located on Southern Vancouver Island and extends from coastal islands in the Strait of Georgia to the Pacific West Coast between Port Renfrew and Nitinat Lake. The CVRD is bordered to the south by the Capital Regional District (CRD), to the north by the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) and the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD). This Regional District is one of the smallest of the 28 Regional Districts across British Columbia.

### 4.1 Key Facts

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- Area = 3,473.12 sq. km. (10.3% of Vancouver Island land mass, 3.7% of BC)
- Population = 79,800 (2006 Census Canada)
- Approximately 61% of the CVRD landbase is under private ownership (primarily a result of the E and N land grant of 1883).
- The approximately 39% remainder of public land within the CVRD includes Provincial Crown Lands, Federal Crown/First Nations Lands, BC Parks, CVRD Parks, Municipal and Community Parks and Municipal Forest Lands.

The Cowichan Valley Region includes:

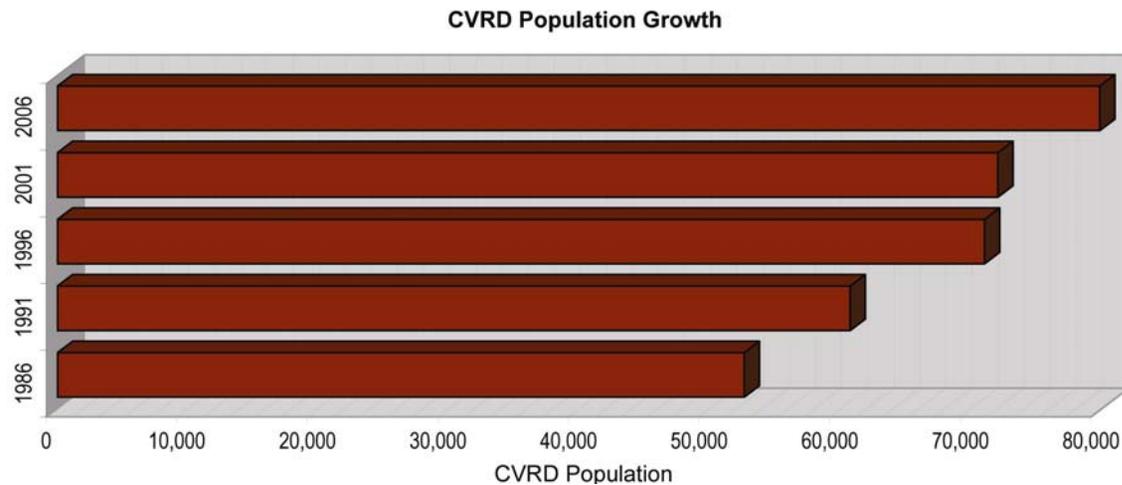
- 9 Electoral Areas;
- 4 municipalities: Town of Ladysmith, City of Duncan, Town of Lake Cowichan and the Municipality of North Cowichan; and
- 10 First Nation groups: Chemainus, Cowichan, Cowichan Lake, Ditidaht, Halalt, Lyacksun, Malahat, Pacheedaht, Pauquachin and Penelakut.

Urban populated areas, including the Town of Lake Cowichan, Town of Ladysmith and the City of Duncan, have the smallest land areas. These combined areas are less than 1% of the CVRD's total land base. The largest local jurisdictional area in the CVRD is Electoral Area F (Cowichan Lake South/Skutz Falls), which covers over 50% of the CVRD's total land base.

## 4.2 Regional Growth Trends

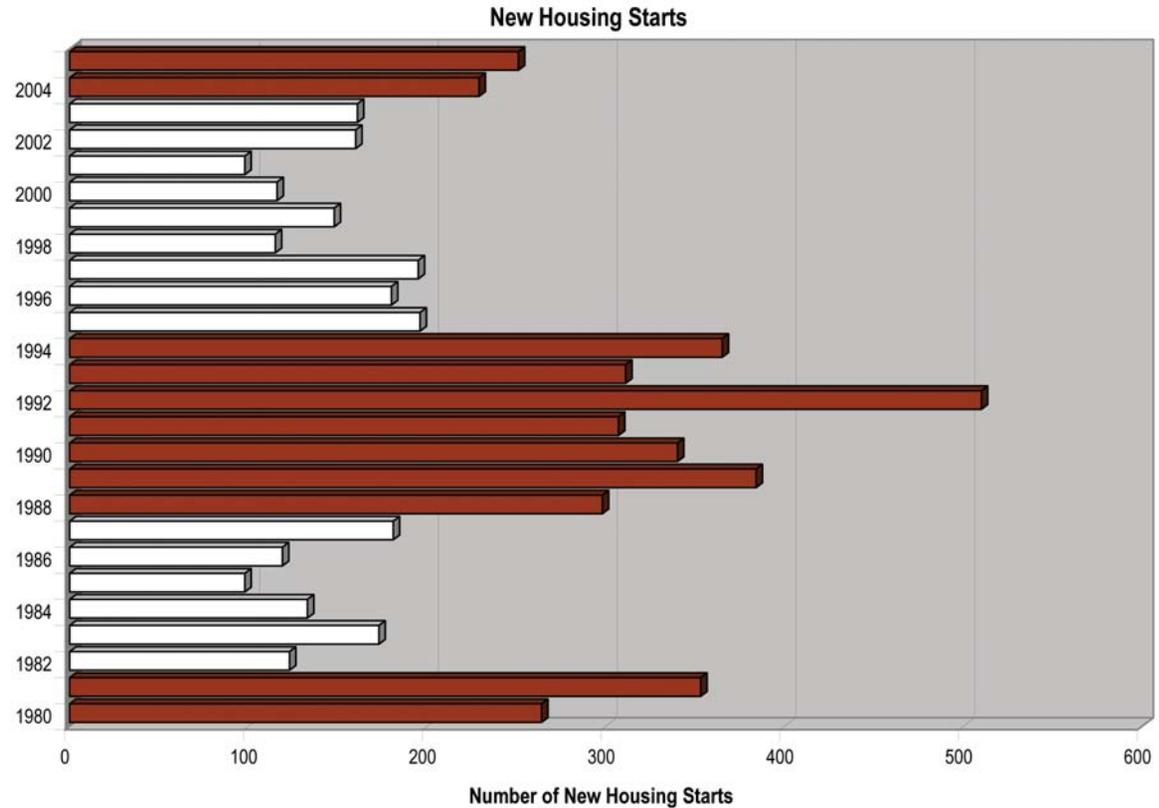
### *Population Growth*

The population growth within the CVRD from 1986 to 1996 was very significant with a 35.0% increase (from 52,575 in 1986 to 70,978 in 1996). Census data indicated that population growth slowed from 1996 to 2001 with only a modest increase of 1.5%. The overall population of the CVRD in 2001 was 71,998 rising to 79,800 in 2006 (11% increase over 5 years). This growth trend is typical for communities along the east coast of Vancouver Island.



Looking forward, the Province projects the CVRD will continue to steadily grow in population influenced in part by spin-off growth from both the Capital Regional District (CRD) and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). In the short term it is anticipated that continued losses in forestry jobs will be offset by net in-migration (BC Stats, P.E.O.P.L.E. 30). Overall, the Cowichan Region is expected to grow by around 30% by 2031 to 103,133 (BC Stats, Population Projections P.E.O.P.L.E. 31).

Local government information on new housing starts matches with population growth, showing construction peaks in the early 80s and 90s. The grow rate slowed in the late 1990s, but it appears the CVRD is again entering a time of rapid growth in new housing development.



With population growth expected to continue increasing on Vancouver Island, the Cowichan Region needs to plan ahead to set aside suitable land areas for parks and trails for both the existing regional community and for anticipated increased demand for these types of outdoor recreation opportunities as the regional population continues to grow.

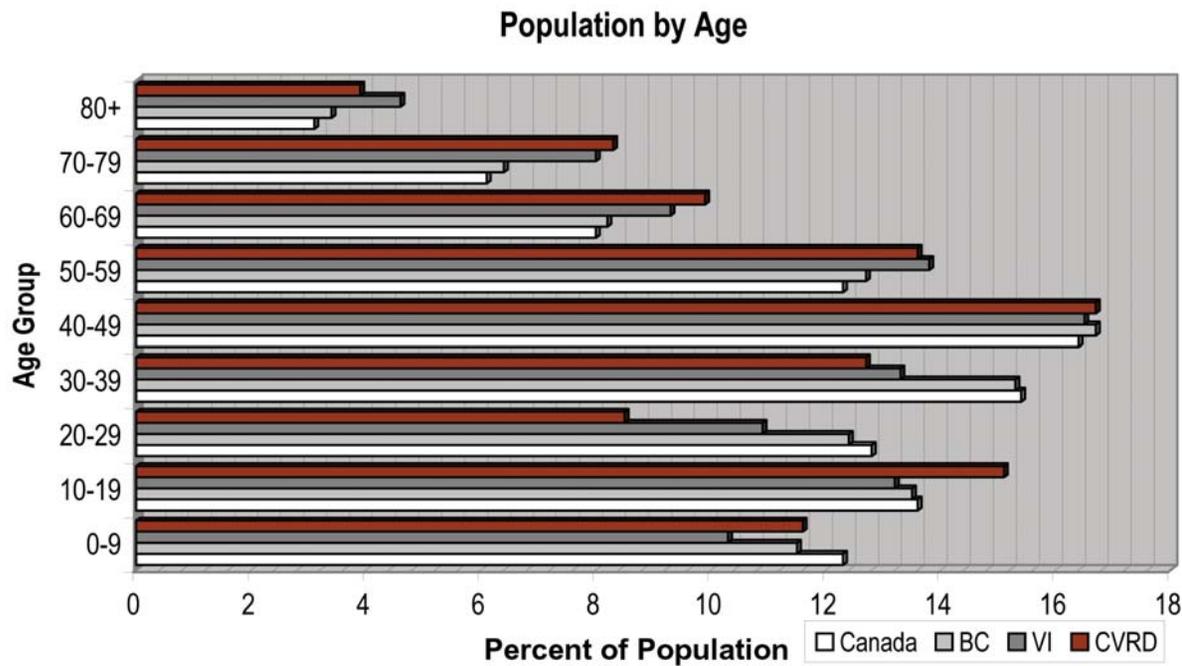
*Rural and Urban Development*

CVRD is more rural in character than the CRD to the south and RDN to the north. Recent population growth trends are most evident in the communities of North Cowichan, Ladysmith and South Cowichan Electoral Areas A (Mill Bay/ Malahat), B (Shawnigan Lake) and D (Cowichan Bay). Population growth is expected to continue through ongoing developments in the Cowichan Lake Area

(Electoral Area F), on the former Bamberton Lands (Mill Bay/Malahat Electoral Area A) and the Youbou Mill Site (Youbou/Meade Creek Electoral Area I) lands.

### Regional Lifestyles

The chart below indicates the CVRD has a proportionally larger number of children under the age of 10 than the rest of Vancouver Island, and more teenagers than Vancouver Island, BC and the rest of Canada (BC Stats). This may suggest a greater demand for outdoor recreation opportunities aimed for teen interests. The proportionately high number of young children indicates this trend will continue for the foreseeable future.



Similar to the rest of Vancouver Island, a large proportion of seniors (age 60+) also reside in the Cowichan Region. The ratio of older residents has been increasing and is higher than the Province as a whole (BC Stats). Creating opportunities for seniors to participate in leisure programs, including

outdoor-based recreation activities encourages seniors to maintain their overall fitness levels, develop social contacts and provide a continuing sense of personal health and wellness.

### 4.3 Natural Environment

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Vancouver Island's eastern coastal lowland and adjacent Gulf Islands comprise an ecological region unique in Canada. The uniqueness is due to the mild climate and long growing season, which support many rare species of plants and animals as well as a variety of productive ecosystems that are not found anywhere else in Canada.

The Cowichan Valley Regional District includes coastal mountain and upland habitats, low lying foothill and valley lands. The Region includes freshwater drainage systems that merge with the Georgia Basin coastal ecosystems in a rich estuarine complex of seasonally flooded valleys, freshwater lakes, slow moving rivers, fresh and saltwater wetlands, and estuaries. This vast and varied physical environment provides abundant aquatic and upland habitat for many species of fish, waterfowl, birds and mammals.

#### *Sensitive Ecosystems*

In 1993 the Canadian Wildlife Service, Provincial Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, Provincial Ministry of Water, Lands and Parks, and the Habitat Conservation Fund commissioned a Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory (SEI) for Eastern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. The objective was "to identify areas of greatest ecological concern...to promote a proactive approach to land use decisions."

This inventory showed that by the early 1990s only 7.9% of the study area was comprised of sensitive ecosystems, and an additional 11.6% of the land area was noted as "other" important ecosystems. The study area included only a portion of the CVRD, incorporating an upland band (covering mainly the Coastal Douglas-fir and Coastal Western Hemlock Biogeoclimatic Zones) along the eastern coastline (from 4 – 12 km in width) and the Highway 18 corridor (approximately 6 km in width). Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) data collected is therefore limited to the areas encompassing: Duncan, Town of Ladysmith, Town of Lake Cowichan, North Cowichan and approximately 5,330 hectares of the Regional Districts Electoral Areas. The total land area in the Cowichan Region covered by the SEI is 81,973 hectares (covering approximately 8.2% of the entire region).

Seven Sensitive Ecosystem types considered rare and ecologically sensitive (AXYS Environmental Consulting Ltd, 2004) are noted within the zonal areas assessed in the Cowichan Region.

1. **Coastal Bluff** – Coastal bluff ecosystems are found on the coast from the water’s edge to lands just above the high tide mark. Many distinct plant communities have developed in response to this relatively harsh environment of crashing waves, currents, tides winds, heat, storms and salt spray. The area of Coastal Bluff ecosystem identified in CVRD is 100.1 ha (mostly located on the Gulf Islands).
2. **Terrestrial Herbaceous** – Terrestrial herbaceous ecosystems are open wildflower meadows and grassy hilltops, usually interspersed with moss-covered rock outcrops. They typically occur as small openings in forested areas with gentle to moderate slopes and are found in areas of shallow soils and bedrock near shorelines and at the summit of hills and mountains. The area of Terrestrial Herbaceous ecosystem identified in the CVRD is 747.2 ha.
3. **Older Forest** – Older Forest is defined as conifer-dominated forest with an average tree age of 100 years or greater. These stands are structurally complex, with an understory that may contain snags, coarse woody debris in all stages of decomposition and a fully developed moss layer. Low soil moisture conditions favour open stand structure and low growth of herbs, grasses and woody shrubs in the understory. Two Biogeoclimatic zones in the CVRD are recognized as Older Forest ecosystems: Coastal Douglas-fir zone, and the Coastal Western Hemlock zone. The total Area of Older Forest ecosystem identified in CVRD is 640.2 ha.
4. **Riparian** – Riparian ecosystems are found on floodplains adjacent to lakes, streams and rivers, where high soil moisture and light conditions support distinct soils and plant communities. The area of Riparian ecosystem identified in CVRD is 1302.3 ha.
5. **Sparsely Vegetated** – In Sparsely Vegetated areas, coverage consists mainly of sand, gravel or bedrock with little vegetation. Several distinct plant communities have adapted to this harsh environment with low moisture and nutrient conditions. The area of Sparsely Vegetated ecosystem identified in CVRD is 24.7 ha.
6. **Woodland** – Woodlands are dry, open forested areas comprised of pure stands of Barry Oak and mixed stands of Douglas-fir/Garry Oak and Douglas-fir/Arbutus. A rich mosaic of wildflowers, grasses, shrubs and mosses characterizes their understory. Woodlands are found on south facing slopes of rocky knolls and bedrock outcroppings with shallow soils. The area of Woodland ecosystem identified in CVRD is 352.3 ha.
7. **Wetland** – Wetland ecosystems are characterized by seasonal or year-round water, either at, or above the soil surface or within the root zone of plants. They are found in areas of flat, undulating terrain and colder, wetter climate. Wetlands encompass a range of plant communities unique to wet environments. The area of Wetland ecosystem identified in CVRD is 1222.7 ha.

Two other important ecosystem types, while altered by human use, are considered valuable for general biodiversity and wildlife habitat values (AXYS Environmental Consulting Ltd, 2004):

1. **Older Second Growth Forest** – Older Second Growth Forests function as both essential habitat areas for many wildlife species and as primary connections between ecosystems in the highly fragmented landscape of the Georgia Basin. All Second Growth Forests have been disturbed by logging or other human activities since the settlement of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands began. The area of Older Second Growth Forest identified in the CVRD is 3797.6 ha.
2. **Seasonally Flooded Agriculture Fields** – Seasonally Flooded Agricultural Fields are lands that have been modified for agricultural use, but have important wildlife habitat value during specific times of the year. These fields are located primarily in low-lying areas such as valley bottoms and deltas of large alluvial rivers and creeks. In some cases they are found on moisture-receiving sites, usually in association with lakeshore or lowlands adjacent to coastal bays. They are often former wetlands, and in many cases, are located adjacent to surviving wetlands such as marshes, swamps and wet meadows. In such cases, other environmental factors such as poor drainage or a high water table contribute to flooding during the winter and fall rain season. The area of Seasonally Flooded Agriculture Fields identified in the CVRD is 779.9 ha.

The total sensitive ecosystem area that was identified and assessed through the SEI study in the sections of the Cowichan Region is approximately 4,390 ha. The area of “other” important ecosystems is 4,578 ha for a combined land coverage area of 8,968 ha or 2.6% of the entire Regional District. These numbers do not include ecosystems within the western part of the Regional District, which are located beyond the boundary of the SEI study area.

### *Other Significant Environmental Features/Attributes*

The watersheds of the Region, including the Cowichan, Chemainus and Koksilah River watersheds, provide enormous productive capacity for spawning and rearing habitat for salmon, trout and other freshwater fish species. As well, the extensive wetland areas at the mouth of these rivers support many species of waterfowl. Recognition of the natural productive value of these systems has led to the formal designation and protection of Somenos Marsh and the Cowichan Bay estuary, involving the participation of various levels of government and environmental agencies

### *Sensitive Ecosystem Loss*

Urban and rural based development expansion has continued throughout the Cowichan Region, contributing to a steady loss of ecologically significant lands and important wildlife habitats:

- In 2004 a study was performed by AXYS Environmental Consulting Ltd. to map areas of disturbance using air photos flown in 2002. The original 1995 Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory showed 8% of the Vancouver Island study area contained natural sensitive ecosystems. By 2004 the study showed that over 11% of the sensitive ecosystems on Eastern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands had been lost.

- Disturbance of sensitive ecosystems included clearing/logging, industrial, urban and rural residential land uses, agriculture, trails/recreation, roads and other human activities.
- Within the CVRD 206 ha. (4.7%) of the originally mapped sensitive ecosystems were lost between 1993 and 2004.
- 306 ha (7.5%) of other important ecosystems in the CVRD were lost during the same period.
- The majority of sensitive and other important ecosystem losses (468 ha) were due to clearing/logging activities.
- The level of disturbance in Older Second Growth Forest and Older Forests due to forestry activities and urban encroachment is higher than other sensitive ecosystem types assessed.
- Older Second Growth Forest experienced the highest loss at 303 ha. Other sensitive areas lost between 1992 and 2002 included:
  - Older Forest - 131ha.
  - Riparian - 26ha.
  - Woodland - 21ha.
  - Wetland - 20ha.
  - Herbaceous Terrestrial - 5ha.
  - Seasonally Flooded Agriculture Fields - 3ha.
  - Coastal Bluff and Sparsely Vegetated ecosystems experienced no losses.

## *5.0 The Role of Regional Parks & Trails*

The role of a Regional Parks and Trail system can differ widely from Regional District to Regional District. Some Regional Districts in BC have created park and trail network plans that focus on land acquisition for environmental protection. Other Regional Districts have directed investment towards the provision of outdoor recreational services and facilities. Since the needs and expectations of local communities in each Regional District vary, an important step in the development of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan for the Cowichan Valley is the community consultation process undertaken as part of the Plan development.

### *5.1 Regional Survey of Residents Needs & Expectations*

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To gauge the regional community's interest in Regional Parks and Trails, a mailout survey was distributed to 1,000 randomly selected CVRD households in April 2006. The survey process and procedures prescribed were designed to achieve a 95% confidence that results are statistically valid within 5% of what the regional population of the CVRD is really doing and thinking. In other words, if the survey was repeated nineteen more times, the results would be within 5% of the first results in all but one of the twenty surveys conducted.

The detailed survey results are extensive and are available in Appendix B. This section provides the summary highlights of the survey process.

#### *Who answered the Survey?*

The survey asked four demographic questions about the respondents. Responses indicated the survey sample slightly over represents females (58%) and under represents males (42%) and slightly over represents elder citizens (41% over 60 years old). However, when the behavioral and opinion questions were cross-referenced against the demographic questions there were relatively few areas where respondent answers varied to any degree based on age or gender.

#### *Benefits of Parks in the Cowichan Region*

Survey respondents believe that benefits derived from the parks and trails in the Region are quite extensive. When asked about direct benefits to their household, 76% of respondents felt that parks benefited, or strongly benefited their household. When asked how much parks provided indirect

benefits to all citizens of the community, the level of benefit expressed was even higher, at 88% believing that parks benefited or strongly benefited the regional community.

However, as the age of respondents increased, the degree of benefit they saw for their household decreased, as did the degree of benefit they perceived for the community. Households with dependent children perceived more benefit to both the household and to the broader community than households without dependent children. The perception of greater benefit to the community than to the responding household suggests the notion of “public good” (defined as indirect benefit to all citizens regardless of how much or little of ones’ own personal use of a good or service) is strongly supported in the regional community.

### *Use of Parks in the Cowichan Region*

There is a very broad cross section of public uses within existing parks across the Cowichan Region. About four out of every five households had used a park one or more times in the past year. Households with two parents and dependent children were more likely to use parks, and older citizens were less likely to use parks than younger citizens. Also, respondents who have lived in the Region a long time were less likely to use parks than newer residents.

The most popular uses of parks include:

- walking or running (92%),
- picnicking (36%), and
- nature study/bird watching (27%).

These activities are followed by other categories of use including:

- cycling and horseback riding (25%),
- camping (22%),
- playing organized sports (14%), and
- participating in motorized sports (9%).

### *Barriers to Use of Parks*

When asked what limits household-use of parks or trails, the single most frequent response was “little or nothing”, at 45% of respondents.

However, a significant number of respondents did indicate a limit or barrier. The most frequently listed barriers were:

- lack of information about parks (33.5%),
- personal or physical limitation (14%),
- location of parks (12%),
- inadequate facilities (8%), and
- getting to or from park sites (6%).

### *Satisfaction Levels*

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the number of different types of parks and trails in the Cowichan Region. The following table summarizes their relative satisfaction levels.

#### **Satisfaction With the Number of Parks and Trails**

| Park or Trail                               | Not Satisfied | Somewhat and More Satisfied | Satisfied and Very Satisfied |
|---|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Regional Parks (Sandy Pool)                 | 6%            | 56%                         | 38%                          |
| Community Parks                             | 7%            | 51%                         | 42%                          |
| Regional Trail (Cowichan Valley Trail)      | 5%            | 48%                         | 47%                          |
| Community Trails and Neighbourhood Pathways | 9%            | 52%                         | 39%                          |

In the above table, the highest satisfaction ratings were with the Regional Trail system. Respondents were also asked a specific question about their satisfaction levels with existing trails in the Cowichan Region. Responses to this question are summarized in the following table.

#### **Satisfaction With the Existing Trails**

| Trail Attribute              | Not Satisfied | Somewhat and More Satisfied | Satisfied and Very Satisfied |
|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Variety and length of trails | 5%            | 52%                         | 44%                          |

|   |    |     |     |
|---|----|-----|-----|
| Trail accessibility                             | 4% | 53% | 43% |
| Trail safety                                    | 4% | 51% | 44% |
| Trail construction and environmental protection | 2% | 52% | 46% |

### *Role of the Regional Parks System*

A number of possible roles for the Regional Parks system were listed in the questionnaire and respondents were asked which were most important. The following table summarizes the responses.

#### **Most Important Roles for Regional Parks System**

| Role  | Not Important | Somewhat or More Important | Important or Very Important |
|---|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Provide opportunities for outdoor recreation      | 1%            | 9%                         | 90%                         |
| Protect environmentally sensitive areas           | 1%            | 11%                        | 88%                         |
| Protect important/unique geographic features      | 2%            | 10%                        | 88%                         |
| Protect significant sites in the Cowichan Region  | 2%            | 12%                        | 86%                         |
| Provide trail links between parks and communities | 2%            | 27%                        | 71%                         |
| Attract tourists                                  | 6%            | 33%                        | 61%                         |

Responses indicated outdoor recreation and protection of sensitive areas were more important than trail linkages and creating attractions for tourists. Finally, respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the current level of maintenance and maintenance standards of various park types and provision of park amenities. These responses are summarized in the following table.

**Satisfaction with Current level of maintenance and standards**

| Park Type               | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|
| Totlots and playgrounds | 17%          | 59%     | 24%       |
| Sportsfields            | 16%          | 52%     | 32%       |
| Trails                  | 12%          | 42%     | 46%       |
| Community Parks         | 12%          | 48%     | 40%       |
| School Grounds          | 24%          | 51%     | 25%       |

The responses indicated there is a greater degree of satisfaction with totlots, playgrounds, sports fields, trails and community parks, with a slightly less degree of satisfaction with school grounds for outdoor recreation use.

*Support for Regional Parks Expansion and Improvement*

Respondents were asked a few questions about the need for additional Regional Parks and/or park amenities. The first question asked what types of Regional Parks were most important. The following table summarizes the responses.

**Summary of Most Important Additional Regional Park Types**

| Types of Additions Most Important | Proportion Supporting |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Waterfront/beach parks (ocean)    | 57%                   |
| Waterfront/beach parks (lake)     | 47%                   |
| River corridor parks              | 41%                   |
| Regional trail connections        | 33%                   |

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Nature preserves             | 28% |
| Mountain/alpine parks        | 25% |
| Historical sites             | 25% |
| Multi-field sports complex   | 19% |
| Motorized recreational parks | 14% |

The only demographic variance in the above answers was the fact that older respondents were more likely to want additional ocean waterfront parks than younger respondents.

The second question in this series asked about the need for additional amenities or features that were required in the Regional Parks and Trails system. A minority (44%) of respondents felt that such additions were needed. The types of park amenities most frequently included in the responses were as follows:

- signage and information booths,
- bathroom and change room facilities,
- garbage cans and cleanup crews,
- services to separate (i.e. designated off-leash areas) or clean up after dogs in parks, and
- trail facilities and connections.

### *Financing Regional Parks and Trails*

The survey asked a few questions about financing improvements to the Regional Parks system. The first question asked if the respondent supported additional public investment in the Regional Parks and Trails system. Approximately 81% of completed questionnaires included responses indicating support for one or more priorities for public investment to improve Regional Parks and Trails. Responses are summarized in the table below.

**Summary of Highest Priorities for Increased Public Investment in Regional Parks and Trails**

| Type of Investment                         | Proportion Support |
|--|--------------------|
| Acquisition of land for new Regional Parks | 54%                |
| Improve the Regional Trail system          | 41%                |
| Increase maintenance of existing parks     | 40%                |
| Install amenities within existing parks    | 40%                |

A further question asked specifically about support for tax increases to support Regional Parks and Trails. All respondents were asked, *“If a special property tax were set to solely fund parkland acquisition for the Regional Parks and Trails system, how much tax increase would you support?”* The responses are summarized in the following table.

**Support for Tax Increases to Fund Regional Parkland Acquisition**

| Degree of Tax Increase  | Proportion Supporting |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| None – no increase      | 24%                   |
| \$10-\$20 per year      | 37%                   |
| \$21-\$30 per year      | 17%                   |
| \$31-\$40 per year      | 6%                    |
| \$41-\$50 per year      | 9%                    |
| More than \$50 per year | 7%                    |

It should be noted that while 76% of the sample supports tax increases for additional Regional Parkland acquisition, respondents over the age of 60 were less likely to support such tax increases. Citizens over 60 were disproportionately large in the sample therefore it is likely that the actual level of support for tax increases in the local population may exceed 76%.

### *Park Acquisition Rating System*

A park acquisition rating system was set up to rank individual parks when they come up for acquisition. The ranking is not based on which parks are better, but on the basis of which parks are more threatened by development or loss to public use. The following are the definitions of the three categories that were set up:

#### **Primary Acquisition Sites**

The primary sites may come under increasing development potential. These sites should be aggressively pursued.

#### **Secondary Acquisition Sites**

The secondary sites are under less development pressure than the primary sites. These sites are critical to the overall plan but there may be additional time available for acquisition.

#### **Tertiary Acquisition Sites**

These sites are either under little development pressure or are not feasible to acquire at this time. It is important to monitor these sites and more actively pursue them as they become available or are threatened by development.

## **5.2 Public Open Houses**

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Consultation with residents and stakeholders within the CVRD occurred as part of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Planning Process. Open House sessions were held throughout the Regional District in both the spring and fall of 2006 to provide a venue for CVRD residents to share their ideas and opinions. The ideas generated through consultations contributed to establishing the Plan's vision, policies, priorities and actions for regionally significant parks and trails across the Cowichan Region.

### *Spring Public Open House Information Sessions*

Over a two week period in March / April 2006, the first set of public open houses were held at four venues in the four subsectors of the Region:

- West Section – Lake Cowichan Recreation Centre,
- South Section – Kerry Park Recreation Centre,
- East Section – Cowichan Centre, and
- North Section – Ladysmith Secondary School.

Over 320 CVRD residents attended these Regional Parks and Trails Public Information Sessions. The purpose of these Open Houses was to obtain public input, refine an overall vision for a Regional Parks and Trails system, gather information on favourite outdoor recreation activities in the Cowichan Region and ask for opinions on outdoor recreation and environmentally important sites of significance around the Region. The open house sessions included:

- Exhibition of a series of presentation boards;
- Presentation of a brief slideshow on the Master Plan process and facilitation of an open question period;
- Interactive mapping that identified a total of 104 sites of interest around the Region for outdoor recreation and/or environmental significance, by open house participants; and
- Submission of 169 individual response forms.

The sizable attendance, as well as positive feedback, demonstrated a large level of public interest in the issues of Regional Parks and Trails. A key result of these sessions was the creation of an extensive list of sites for outdoor recreation and environmentally important sites of significance as expressed by participants at the open houses. See Appendix C for a summary of individuals response forms gathered at the first Public Open House. See Appendix D for a list of the sites of regional interest as expressed by attendees to the Public Open House sessions.

### *Fall Public Information Sessions*

In October / November 2006, a second series of public meetings were held over a three week period at four venues in the four sub-sectors of the Region:

- West Section – Lake Cowichan Centennial Hall,
- South Section – Kerry Park Recreation Centre,
- East Section – Silverbridge Inn Duncan, and

- North Section – Ladysmith Secondary School.

Nearly 100 Cowichan Valley residents attended the second open house sessions. These sessions were held to report back to the community on the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan process and to obtain feedback on key issues that arose throughout the planning process. These sessions also gathered input on the proposed Regional Park Candidate Sites. The open house sessions included:

- Exhibition of a series of presentation boards;
- Presentation of a brief slideshow on the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan process and facilitation of a question period;
- Informal discussion in which consultants, CVRD staff and members of the Parks and Trails Advisory group were available to answer and record attendees' specific questions and comments; and
- Submission of 46 individual response forms.

The responses and comments gathered at these sessions demonstrated continued support for the proposed Regional Parks and Trails Vision and provided more detailed information about the Parks and Trails Candidate Sites to be included in the Master Plan. Feedback also demonstrated support for the development of a special Regional Parkland acquisition tax. See Appendix F for a summary of public input gathered at the second series of Public open house sessions.

### 5.3 Stakeholder Consultations

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#### *Stakeholder Group Consultation Process*

Stakeholder consultations were undertaken with First Nations, Federal and Provincial agencies, local governments and a number of outdoor recreation conservation organizations. Consultations undertaken during the summer of 2006 were designed to identify potential challenges, issues and opportunities associated with each of the candidate sites. For the convenience of stakeholder agencies, a summary brochure was circulated for this review and comment opportunity. Follow-up telephone calls and e-mails were sent to each of the agencies and organizations identified. Invitations were extended to attend and participate in the Fall Public Open House Sessions.

Of the 87 stakeholder representatives contacted, 16 responses were received. Some of the stakeholder contacts represented the same agency but in different capacities. The agencies/organizations contacted, and responses received are summarized in Appendix G. Of those stakeholders who responded, there were no significant issues of concern expressed. In general,

agencies expressed an interest in being more extensively involved in the future detailed planning stage of specific sites to be acquired and managed by the CVRD for Regional Park purposes.

### *Ongoing Stakeholder Consultation Activities with Plan Implementation*

To encourage an ongoing consultation process with neighbouring First Nations, additional communication methods should be considered. Recommendations for more comprehensive consultations with First Nation communities are outlined below which will help to create a productive and positive environment for the implementation of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan. These initiatives include:

- formalizing a dialogue between the CVRD and First Nations which include the potential of a “board-to-council” meeting; and
- the development of a protocol to address interests in the acquisition and/or use of land for recreational purposes, within the First Nations territories.

## 5.4 Consultation Summary – Outdoor Recreation

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From the consultation process described above there were a number of persistent gaps identified in the outdoor recreational amenities provided throughout the Cowichan Region. A number of these gaps were deficiencies that could be traced to historical development patterns. Others were gaps that became prominent in the face of increased population growth and the resulting changes in land use. Input from the public and stakeholders on several key issues and gaps emerging during the consultation process are summarized as follows:

### *Informal Access for Outdoor Recreation*

Many of the regional community’s favourite informal outdoor recreation spots/locations are not adequately secured in a manner that can ensure continued public access. In many circumstances these places are either on private lands or are managed by public agencies for primarily forestry activities or other non-public recreation uses. In previous decades when communities around the Region were smaller and recreational demands were fewer, there typically were no issues related to unobstructed public access to private lands for recreation. However, with increased demands on the lands and a greater onus on public liability and protection of investments, there are growing limitations to unobstructed access to recreational lands.

### *Waterfront Access*

A consistent message through all of the public consultations was the desire to secure and maintain public recreational access to waterfront. The desire for access is not only to coastal waterfronts and marine areas but to the Region's lakes, rivers and streams.

### *Information about Parks*

When asked about factors that limit access to parks, residents of the Cowichan Region frequently referred to the need for better information about existing and proposed park developments. Confusion about the interrelationships between Municipal and Regional Parks, and between Regional Parks and the Provincial and National Park system was frequently evident.

### *The Value of Trails*

The recreational value of trails is frequently underestimated. Even within the Cowichan Region, where considerable energy and effort has already been directed toward the establishment of a regional trail system, there is clearly a public desire/demand for additional trail connections throughout the Region. Trails have been identified in public open houses and through the mail out survey as a consistently high priority for the Regional Parks and Trails program.

### *Motorized Recreation*

The desire for motorized outdoor recreation was identified at several of the community open houses. Perhaps more than any other aspect, this form of outdoor recreation has been impacted by growth within the Region and changing land use patterns. Off-road bikes, quads, and snow machines more and more frequently come in contact with both land based industrial uses (forestry) as well as residential uses and other forms of recreation. Due to the distances travelled and noise created by these vehicles the frequency of interaction with other land users escalates.

From community consultations it became evident that motorized recreation constitutes a large recreational user group within the Cowichan Region. Several motorized recreation user groups have been proactive and positive in providing public education and creating user Codes of Conduct and trail maintenance. On the other hand, stories of environmental damage and damage to private property in connection with motorized vehicle use still persist throughout the Region.

## 5.5 Consultation Summary – The Environment

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The role of Regional Parks in protecting the environment was also raised consistently at community open houses and in survey responses. From these discussions, it is clear that many people recognize the need to protect environmental features and ecosystems throughout the Region.

In the Cowichan Region environmental protection is a significant challenge as changes created by human settlement and land use often overlap with the more environmentally sensitive areas of the Region. The Koksilah, Cowichan and Chemainus estuaries, for example, are all understood to be part of an interconnected natural system providing habitat for migratory birds and waterfowl, as well as significant riparian habitats. Such ecological systems are recognized not only within the Region, but also nationally and internationally.

Although some protection is provided within existing management regimes established for various components of this system, it is evident there is regional community interest and support for a Regional Park and Trail system created that could contribute to the protection of these natural systems.

### *Parks as a Tool for Environmental Protection*

As part of an overall strategy to protect the environment, regional parks can play a specific role. Land with high outdoor recreational value is also frequently important for its environmental attributes. Riparian corridors as well as lakes and coastal waterfront are examples of land that is suitable for outdoor recreation as well as environmental protection. Careful design of public access for recreation in these areas can have a significant effect in reducing the impacts on sensitive ecosystems. On the other hand, parks may be limited in their protective benefit because of their limited land area. Because most parks are only fragments of larger ecosystems the protective benefit of parks may sometimes be limited.

### *Park Management and the Environment*

In some situations the requirement for environmental protection may be at cross-purposes with the recreational goals of a Regional Park system. Where the ecological values/sensitivities may be adversely affected by outdoor recreational activities limitations or restriction in access may be required. Specific management prescriptions to protect and/or enhance sensitive ecological areas should be developed on an area-by-area basis.



## *6.0 Building a Network of Regional Parks & Trails*

The following section describes the main components of a Regional Parks and Trails System for the Cowichan Valley. The individual sites identified as having regional park significance and proposed network of regional trails are designed to work together to establish a system, accessible to all residents of the Cowichan Region.

### **6.1 The Regional Parks and Trails Vision**

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The Cowichan Valley Regional District Board endorsed the following Regional Parks and Trails vision statement in October 2006.

*“The people of the Cowichan Region value and wish 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 within the Region.”*

This vision is the result of community input during the Spring 2006 Public Open House consultations and work by the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group.

#### *Principles for Regional Parks and Trails*

Embedded within the Regional Parks and Trails vision are five broad principles for Regional Parks and Trails.

#### **Provide Outdoor Recreation Opportunities**

The provision of recreational opportunities is a fundamental purpose of the Regional Parks and Trails system. Whereas historically, access to privately owned forested wilderness and waterfront areas around the Cowichan Region has been largely unrestricted, a steadily increasing regional population, changes in land use designations, new development, liability concerns and resource asset protection issues have given rise to increasing limitations to access of recreational lands.

#### **Protect Natural Areas**

The protection of natural areas is the second most frequently cited reason for developing a Regional Parks system. Identified by the regional community as only slightly less important than securing

opportunities for outdoor recreation, the protection of natural areas is strong motivation for acquiring regional parkland.

To review opportunities to incorporate the principle of natural area protection, the Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) mapping was incorporated into the assessment of potential sites of interest for acquisition as regional parks. Where SEI data was not available for lands of interest the assessment incorporated recognizable SEI categories such as riparian areas, and incorporated a base assumption that all riparian areas would benefit from some form of environmental protection. Known Biogeoclimatic zone information was also factored into this review process.

### **Include Representative Landscapes**

To develop a Regional Park system that is broadly representative of the Cowichan Region, the Regional Parks and Trails vision statement provides direction that the system should “feature representative landscapes.” Representation is understood to be representation by landscape type, as well as representation across the Region.

The principle of representative landscapes includes five general landscape types: mountain, ocean, lake, forest and river. These landscape types are intended as a non-scientific categorization related more closely to the way people experience and recreate in the Region. Representation across the Region indicates that a Regional Parks and Trail system should equitably service all CVRD residents.

### **Be Regionally Significant**

The Regional Park system will be important for all people within the Region. Many excellent outdoor recreational opportunities may not be part of the Regional Park system because they may be more appropriately protected and managed as local community parks. Although the difference between a community park and a regional park may initially be confusing, as regionally significant parks are identified and commissioned, the hierarchy and distinctions between community parks and regional parks will become clearer.

### **Support Regional Liveability**

Regional Parks and Trails can contribute to an overall strategy for regional livability. The criteria for reviewing the proposed sites of regional interest for regional livability was whether a site could:

- provide transportation alternatives (trails),
- support compact communities, and/or
- support water conservation.

### *Regional Parks and Trails System*

Compiling a list of Regional Park and Trail sites of interest through the Regional Parks and Trails Master Planning process involved extensive consultation activities across the Region. Over 100 sites of community interest for consideration as a potential Regional Park site or Regional Trail route were identified through the public consultation activities, summarized in Section 5.0. The public interest, and the number of sites recommended, highlights the value residents place on ensuring lands remain accessible for outdoor recreation and enjoyment and to protect environmentally significant landscapes. Regional Parks and Trails have the opportunity to contribute both to the ecological integrity and quality of life within the Region.

Each site of community interest identified by the public was assessed to determine its unique values and potential contributions to the overall Regional Parks and Trails vision. A detailed matrix of these assessments is provided in Appendix E. Through this process a number of sites emerged as having regionally significant attributes that merited more detailed review. To accomplish this review, the following four criteria were applied to each site:

#### **Is the Site Regionally Significant?**

Sites with limited regional significance or of a more local community level of interest, were not considered for further review. Sites identified through this process were eliminated because they drew only limited public interest during the public consultation process, they did not have significant regional uniqueness or, while of public interest, they did not stand alone as being regional in scale. While several candidate sites were not further considered for Regional Park designation, it was recognized that some sites might be worthy of future consideration for the local community parks system under an existing electoral area or municipal community parks program.

#### **Is the Site Accessible?**

Sites of regional interest with potentially significant accessibility constraints (i.e. regionally remote sites, isolated sites without public access) or specific known limitations on the potential to secure the site as a Regional Park were not considered further as part of the review process.

#### **Is the Site Currently Protected?**

A number of locations identified by the public as sites of community interest were already under some form of land use designation for outdoor recreation and/or environmental protection, and therefore were not further considered as requiring protection through the Regional Parks function. Such locations included existing provincial parks within the Region, designated provincial ecological

reserves, established local community parks and lands managed by non-profit environmental organizations such as Ducks Unlimited or the Nature Trust of BC. It is worthy to note that the public's high value of currently managed sites for outdoor recreation and environmental protection supports the establishment of a network of Regional Parks and Trails.

### **Is the Site Similar to Another Site of Regional Significance?**

Where two or more sites identified had similar characteristics meeting the objectives of the Regional Parks and Trails vision, locations with lesser qualities were not considered further in favour of sites that more definitively reflected the character of the overall vision statement.

As an outcome of the site evaluation process, a short-list of candidate sites emerged for further evaluation by the Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group and consultants, including site visits. The review process assessed each site's merits for consideration as a potential regional park. The outcomes of this extensive evaluation and review process were presented at the Fall 2006 Public Open Houses, from which emerged eleven proposed Regional Parks Sites:

- Bald Mountain Peninsula
- Chemainus River and Estuary
- Cobble Hill Mountain and Bamberton Quarry
- Heart and Stocking Lake Uplands
- Cowichan Lake Waterfront
- Malahat, Spectacle, Oliphant Lake and Mt. Jeffrey
- Mount Whymper, Landale, El Capitan and Lomas Lake
- Somenos Marsh
- Stoney Hill/Sansum Narrows
- Ladysmith Harbour Islands
- Osborne Bay Park

In addition, the Plan includes completion of the 140 km Cowichan Valley Regional Trail.

### ***Priorities for Regional Park Site Acquisition***

The Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan recognizes the limited capacity of Regional District resources to implement a parkland acquisition strategy. Resources can be prohibitive to acquiring all the proposed sites within a short timeframe. There is also an issue of current land ownership and competing land use interests, which can influence when opportunities for acquisition arise.

Recognizing these limitations, a priority ranking system was developed to guide the acquisition of the

proposed regional park sites. The priority ranking of the sites should in no way diminish the significance of one site over another, as all sites equally contribute to the overall Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan vision.

#### **Sites of Primary Acquisition Priority**

Primary acquisition sites are locations that may come under increasing land use development pressures. Therefore acquisition of such sites should be considered of priority in the short-term implementation of the plan.

#### **Sites of Secondary Acquisition Priority**

Secondary acquisition sites are locations that may be under less land use development pressures for the foreseeable future. This may provide additional lead-time to establish a strategy to acquire.

#### **Sites of Tertiary Acquisition Priority**

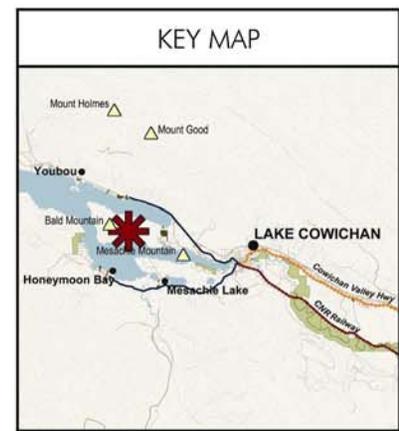
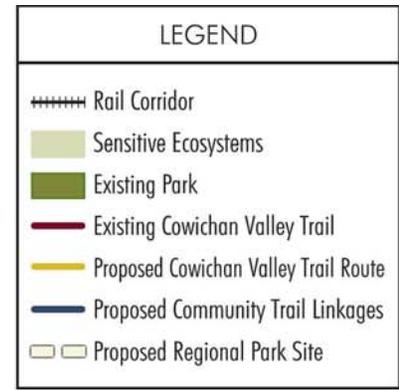
Tertiary acquisition sites are those locations identified which are likely under to little known land use development pressure for the foreseeable future or may not be feasible to acquire at this time. Such sites will be important to monitor for acquisition as opportunities arise or if changes in land use demand re-assessment of acquisition priority.

#### *Proposed Regional Park and Regional Trail Sites*

The following section describes each of the eleven proposed Regional Park sites and the Regional Trail (Cowichan Valley Trail):







## *Bald Mountain Peninsula*



Bald Mountain is visible from all parts of Cowichan Lake and provides excellent opportunities for extensive hiking trails, shoreline recreation and panoramic viewpoints.

### **Site Characteristics**

Bald Mountain Peninsula is a long favoured hiking destination within the Cowichan Region. Visible from every corner of the lake, Bald Mountain is an imposing natural feature that dominates the eastern end of Cowichan Lake both from the water and surrounding communities. It is known for its varied informal hiking trails, water accesses and viewpoints.

### **Location**

Located at the eastern end of Cowichan Lake between North and South Arms. Access is from Marble Bay Road.

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 600 hectares (1483 acres).

### **Description**

The striking height and exposed rock features of Bald Mountain Peninsula combine to create a significant dramatic natural feature on Cowichan Lake.

The peninsula provides many opportunities for outdoor recreation and is accessible by water or land. Many people currently use the peninsula, either for dry land activities such as hiking and picnicking or water recreation such as fishing and boating. Primary access is at the provincial forest recreation site at the head of the peninsula.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Hiking, nature study and appreciation, viewing areas, boating, shoreline fishing, beach activities and picnicking.

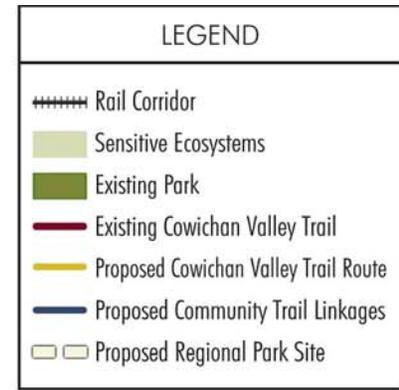
### **Existing Land Ownership**

The majority of Bald Mountain Peninsula is privately owned. Recent logging activities in the area have been intense, and have resulted in the closure / destruction of well-used hiking trails. The Crown owns the remainder of the land, including a large portion of the northwest corner of the peninsula.

### **Role**

Public interest has demonstrated that residents of the CVRD wish to see Bald Mountain Peninsula protected from intense logging and development. Bald Mountain Peninsula provides a backdrop to Cowichan Lake and its lakefront communities. Viewpoints and hiking routes across the Peninsula are well known and enjoyed by CVRD residents. The Plan recognizes an opportunity to preserve the existing natural areas and provide a significant outdoor recreation venue for rejuvenation of the peninsula, while reopening historical and well-used recreational trails.

**Recommendation:** Primary Acquisition



## *Chemainus River Corridor and Estuary*



Chemainus Estuary is a beautiful and environmentally important waterfront.

### **Site Characteristics**

The Chemainus River corridor has a long history of use for steelhead fishing and day use excursions. Chemainus River Provincial Park is well known for viewing the spectacular summer steelhead and Coho salmon runs and providing a variety of day use recreational opportunities.

Historically, large tracts of land in the Chemainus Estuary were actively farmed. Although these fields are now dormant, remnant grassland habitats are well suited for raptors, herons, and small mammals. Some projects have been undertaken to improve tidal inundation and fish habitat, including the breaching of a former dike and construction of channels to inundate areas of the estuary with tidal salt water for longer periods. The estuary is known for traditional shellfish harvesting.

### **Location**

The proposed Regional Park extends from the upper portion of Chemainus River above Chemainus River Provincial Park, off Hillcrest Road to the River's estuary below the Chemainus Road Bridge.

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 400 hectares (988 acres).

### **Description**

The river corridor includes a variety of landscape forms, from steeply sloping riverbanks with deep

rocky pools, to broad forested riparian areas and slow moving gravelly channels.

The intertidal landscape of the estuary provides habitat for a wide variety of mammals, invertebrates, birds and fish. An average of 1,000 waterfowl per day use the estuary during the migration and wintering period.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

The river corridor contains numerous deep swimming pools and forested habitat where visitors can enjoy picnicking, camping, hiking, swimming and wildlife viewing.

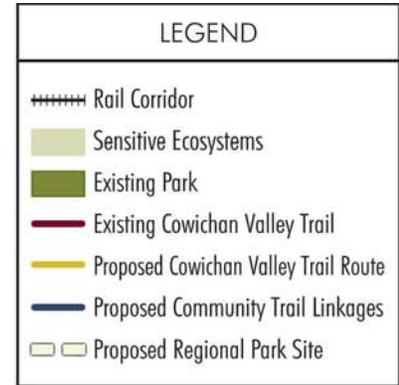
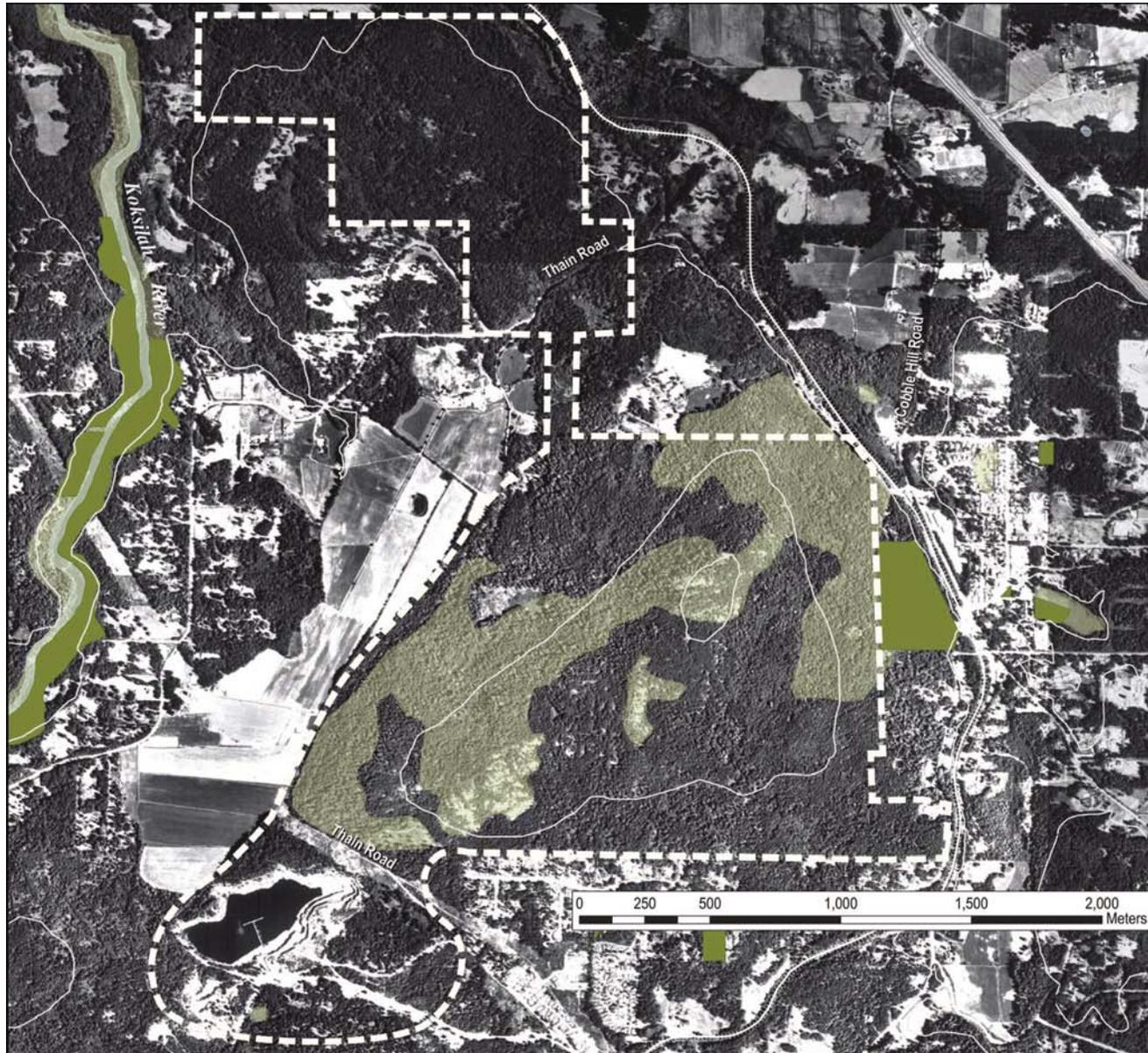
### **Existing Land Ownership**

Lands include Chemainus River Provincial Park, private forest, crown provincial lands and parts of North Cowichan's municipal forest reserve.

### **Role**

The inclusion of the corridor and estuary within the Regional Park system provides water access and allows users to enjoy the natural beauty of this unique river corridor. The coastal waterfront of the estuary incorporates a diverse, complex and beautiful landscape unique to the Region. Park visitors will have access to waterfront trails and opportunity to embark on non-motorized watercraft within a safe and protected environment. The estuary is close to populated areas and is easily accessible by vehicle.

**Recommendation:** Secondary Acquisition



## *Cobble Hill Mountain / Bamberton Quarry*



From the peak tops, panoramic views in all directions enrich sights of the Cowichan Region as far away as Cowichan Lake and distance features of the Gulf Islands, Mount Baker and the Saanich Peninsula.

### **Site Characteristics**

This area has a long history of resource extraction including logging and quarrying. Bamberton Quarry, no longer active, is a remnant of open pit mining in the CVRD. The high and low knolls of Cobble Hill Mountain are unique geographic features in the Region, encircled by lowland farms, clustered rural residential communities and the historic E&N Railway. The lands have long been a popular destination for informal recreation such as hiking, horse back riding and more recently, mountain biking, taking advantage of former logging roads and ongoing trail development.

### **Location**

Electoral Area B (Shawnigan Lake), Electoral Area C (Cobble Hill). Access is from Thain Road, Cobble Hill Road to Empress Road

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 450 hectares (1 112 acres).

### **Description**

Cobble Hill Mountain is 331 meters (1086 ft) above sea level where large herbaceous communities exist. Forested slopes of two knolls and surrounding lowlands exhibit a variety of herbs, mosses, lichens, grasses and wildflowers.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Hiking, nature study and appreciation, bird watching, mountain biking, equestrian trail riding picnicking, swimming and fishing.

### **Existing Land Ownership**

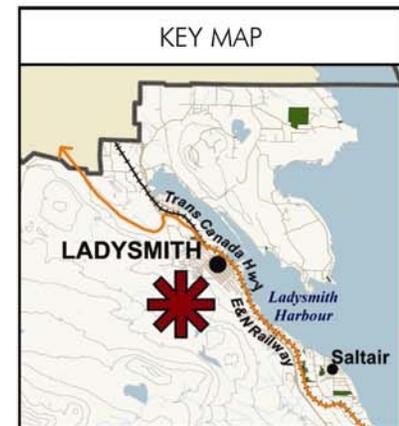
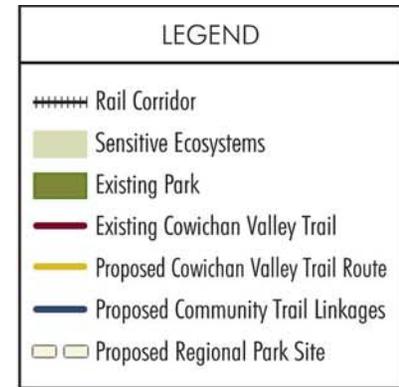
In 2001, the CVRD signed a 30-year agreement with the Ministry of Forests in which the CVRD assumes primary responsibility for management of outdoor recreation activities within the Ministry of Forests' designated 114 hectares (282 ac) Forest Recreation Reserve on Cobble Hill Mountain. In 2003, the CVRD completed a recreation area management plan encompassing approximately 405 hectares (1001 ac) of provincial forestlands including the forest recreation reserve, as the basis for expanding the recreation area. The Bamberton Quarry lands are privately owned.

### **Role**

Located in an area with rapidly expanding population, this site provides access to spectacular viewpoints and extensive trail networks. As a Regional Park, the existing park may be expanded and provided with better overall protection.

### **Recommendation: Primary Acquisition**

Note – Whereas the acquisition of this site overall is considered a high priority, public access to the quarry site should be considered carefully due to possible site contamination related to prior industrial activities and overall safety and liability issues related to the stability of the quarry lands.



## *Heart and Stocking Lake Uplands*



Block 1 above the Town of Ladysmith was the first area logged on Vancouver Island. Older growth trees and spectacular views await visitors.

### **Site Characteristics**

Within hiking distance from the Town of Ladysmith, the Heart Lake and Stocking Lake are popular destinations with hiking loops that provide panoramic views of the Cowichan Valley and Straight of Georgia. Mountain biking, an increasingly popular sport on Vancouver Island, is enjoyed on some of the backwoods trails in these areas. Stocking Lake is one of the main sources of drinking water for the Town of Ladysmith and the community of Saltair. Dramatic viewpoints from perched rock bluffs overlook Ladysmith Harbour, Thetis/Kuper Islands, Chemainus lowlands and Stuart Channel.

### **Location**

Located west and south of the Town of Ladysmith this area can be accessed from Davis Road and Holland Creek Trail (off Mackie Road).

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 250 hectares (618 acres).

### **Description**

Heart and Stocking Lakes are situated within a large natural area in close proximity to Vancouver Island's urbanized east coast. The area is a known informal outdoor recreation destination, with well-developed hiking and biking trails, and offers both active and passive recreation in a natural setting.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Hiking, mountain biking, swimming, wildlife viewing, historical industrial forestry interpretation and panoramic views over the southern Gulf Islands, Ladysmith Harbour, Cedar and Saltair/Chemainus lowlands.

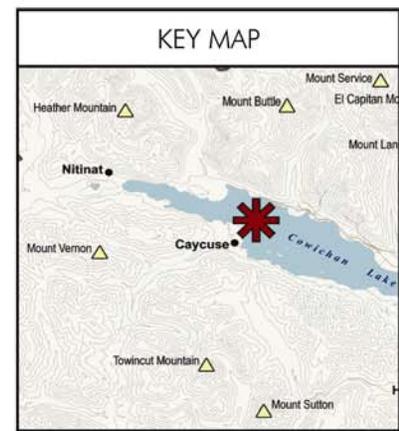
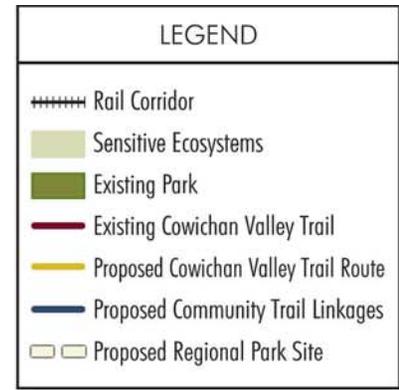
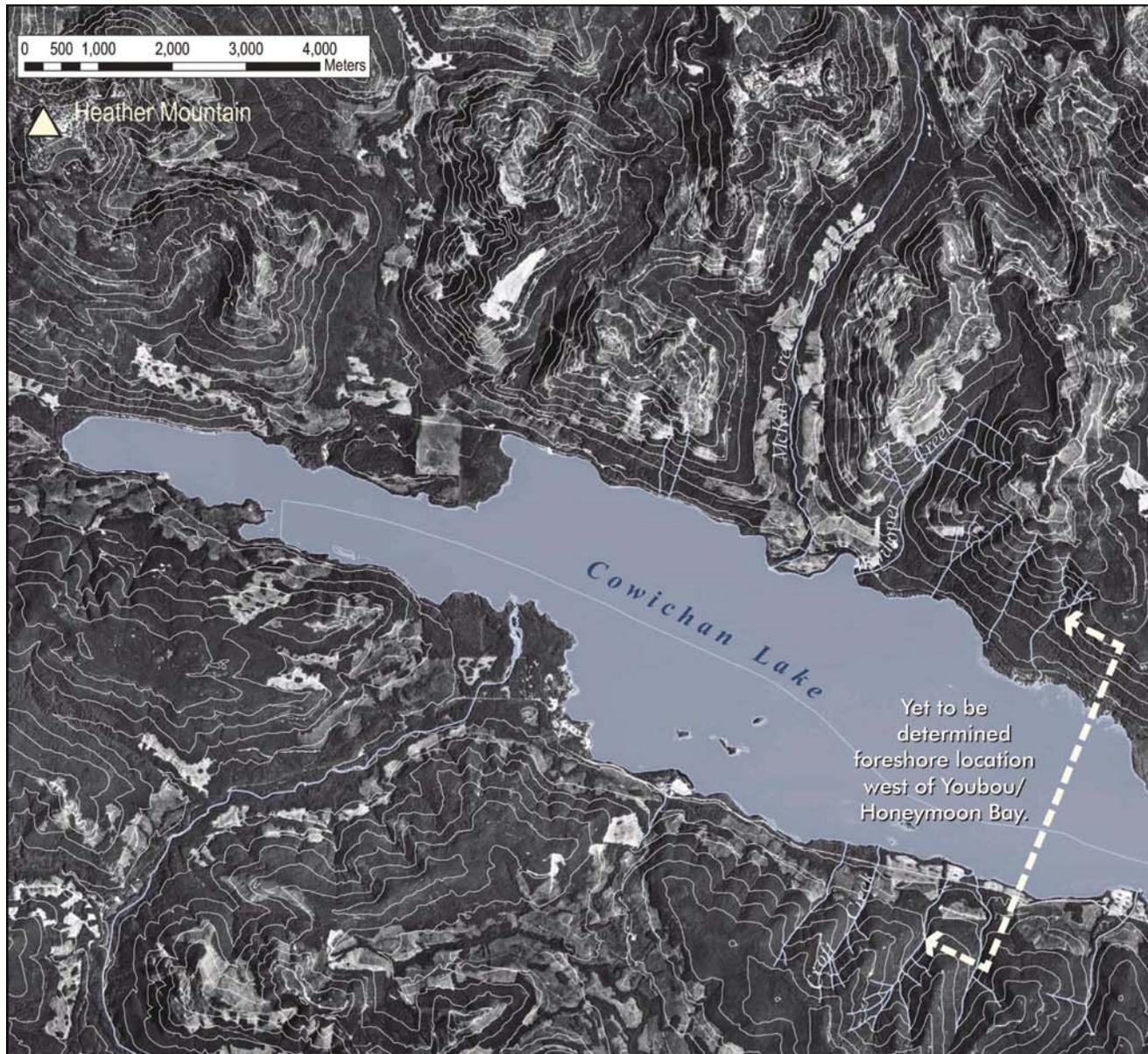
### **Existing Land Ownership**

Both public and private lands are included within the area of interest. Further boundary definition would be required to confirm detailed ownership of the properties.

### **Role**

Located close to the population of Ladysmith, this proposed Regional Park site could provide continued access to extensive trails for hiking and mountain biking for a variety of fitness levels and recreational interests. Interpretive opportunities are also available highlighting the Cowichan Region's logging heritage.

**Recommendation:** Secondary Acquisition



## Cowichan Lake Waterfront



Cowichan Lake is enjoyed by people interested in a variety of water based activities.

### Site Characteristics

Several areas along the Cowichan Lake shoreline west of Youbou and Honeymoon Bay are noted as having significant potential for acquisition and development as a lakefront Regional Park. At this point, no site has been singled out as best satisfying the overall Regional Parks vision. Heather campsite was noted as a popular lake recreation point, with facilities for swimming, boating and camping.

It is anticipated that subsequent planning processes will determine the best location for a Cowichan Lake Regional Park candidate site.

### Location

A lakefront location on Cowichan Lake west of Honeymoon Bay/Youbou.

### Size

Further boundary definition would be required to confirm detailed ownership of the properties.

### Description

Cowichan Lake is a popular summer recreation destination for CVRD residents and visitors. It is one of the largest bodies of fresh water on Vancouver Island, and provides numerous opportunities for swimming, fishing and other outdoor recreation. As the Cowichan Valley continues to grow, more and more properties along the lake's edge are being developed,

emphasizing the need to consider lakefront properties for future park designation.

### Recreation Opportunities

Beach activities, swimming, picnicking, boating, sailing, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, camping and water-sports.

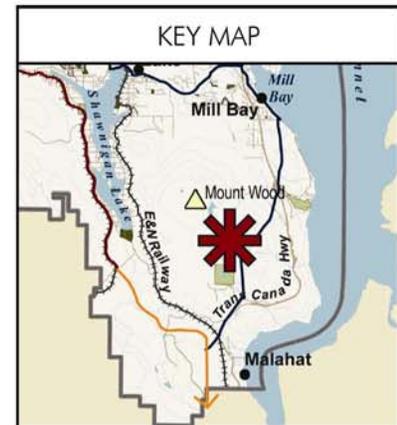
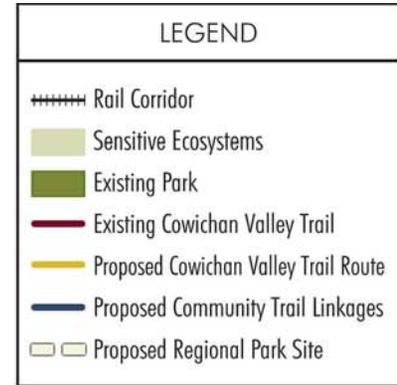
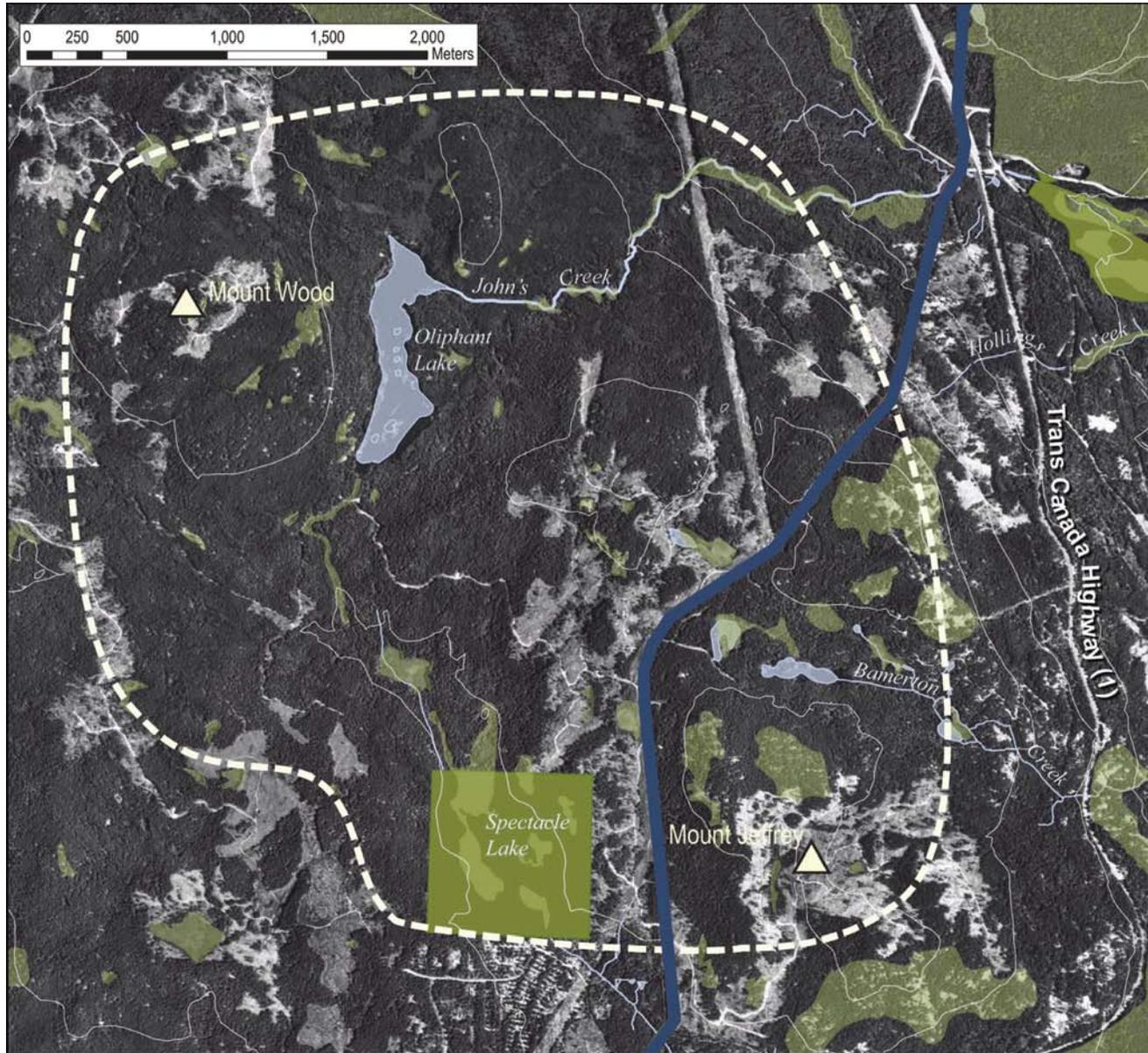
### Existing Land Ownership

The majority of the western portion of the Cowichan Lake shoreline is privately owned, with a few sections of Crown Land along the waterfront.

### Role

A significant Regional Park site on Cowichan Lake responds to public demand for water-based outdoor recreation access on a lakefront site.

**Recommendation:** Tertiary Acquisition



## *Malahat, Spectacle, Oliphant Lakes, Mt. Jeffrey*



Hiking and walking trails for a variety of user abilities connect the area.

### **Site Characteristics**

The Malahat area is popular for both active and passive recreation and provides outstanding views over Saanich Inlet. Spectacle Lake is a significant spring-fed freshwater lake and is a popular hiking destination. The Lake was a sawmill site in the 1940s and was dammed and used to boom logs. This area includes a number of sensitive ecosystems that do not have protection status.

### **Location**

Located in close proximity to Mill Bay and Cobble Hill, this site can be accessed from Highway 1 to Whitaker Road.

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 1200 hectares (2965 acres).

### **Description**

The forest near Spectacle Lake supports a variety of forest fungi and flora, including orchids, Indian paintbrush and wild strawberries. Spectacle Lake itself has the only Eastern Brook trout on Vancouver Island. It is also stocked with cutthroat and rainbow trout, kokanee and smallmouth bass. Multiple sensitive ecosystem types run throughout the area.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Swimming, fishing, canoeing, hiking, picnicking, beach activities, mountain biking, equestrian trail

riding and panoramic views over the valleys and Saanich Inlet.

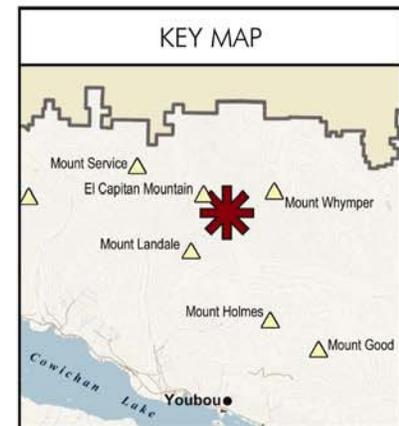
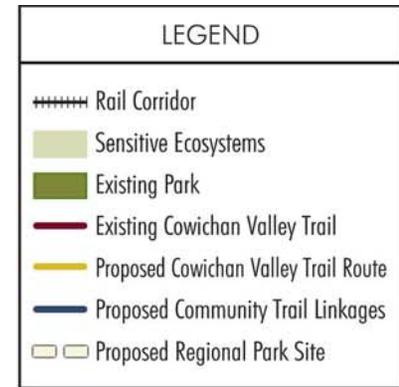
### **Existing Land Ownership**

BC Parks owns the 65 acres surrounding Spectacle Lake, which is managed by the CVRD under a park use permit. The remaining lands are private forestlands.

### **Role**

Spectacle/Oliphant Lakes and Mount Jeffrey are well-established and year-round informal outdoor recreation destinations. An expanded area between the three-featured locales, Spectacle Lake, Oliphant Lake and Mount Jeffrey, provides a mix of forest types influenced by topography and historical forestry practices. The variation in landforms and forest cover provides a dynamic outdoor recreation experience along the Malahat Ridgeline far above Saanich Inlet and Shawnigan Lake.

**Recommendation:** Primary Acquisition



## *Mt. Whymper, Landale, El Capitan & Lomas Lake*



Lomas Lake, framed by Mount Landale, is a popular destination for seasoned hikers.  
Photo credit: Cory Horner, 2006, [www.canoe42.ca](http://www.canoe42.ca)

### **Site Characteristics**

The largely undeveloped west-central portion of the CVRD is characterized by forested and sub-alpine mountains. Mount Whymper has the distinction of both the highest peak in the CVRD and the highest peak in Canada south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Lomas Lake, El Capitan and Mount Landale are linked by an existing hiking trail system and are popular destinations for backcountry hikers. This area is representative of the sub-alpine environments within the Region and provides important habitat for rare species. A 1930s gold/silver mine sits midway up Mount Landale.

### **Location**

North of Cowichan Lake and west of Youbou.

### **Size**

Approximately 800 hectares (1977 acres).

### **Description**

The mountains are representative of Mountain/Sub-Alpine landscapes and site up to an elevation of 1541 metres. The site is the most remote site considered for the Regional Park system. The area provides habitat for a number of blue listed plant and animal species, including the Vancouver Island white-tailed ptarmigan and the red listed Vancouver Island Marmot.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Mountaineering, hiking, wildlife viewing, wilderness camping, equestrian trail riding, historical interpretation, featured sub-alpine views, winter recreation (e.g. snowshoeing) and back country skiing.

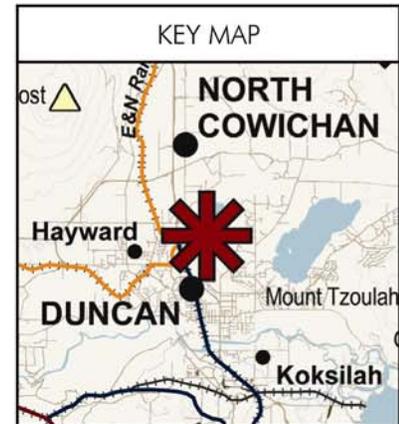
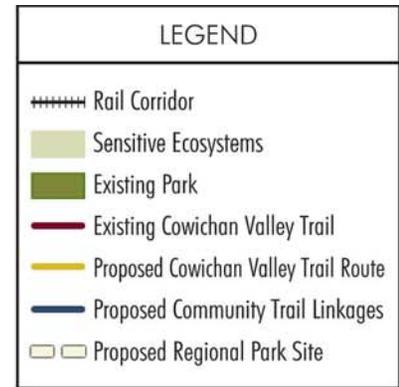
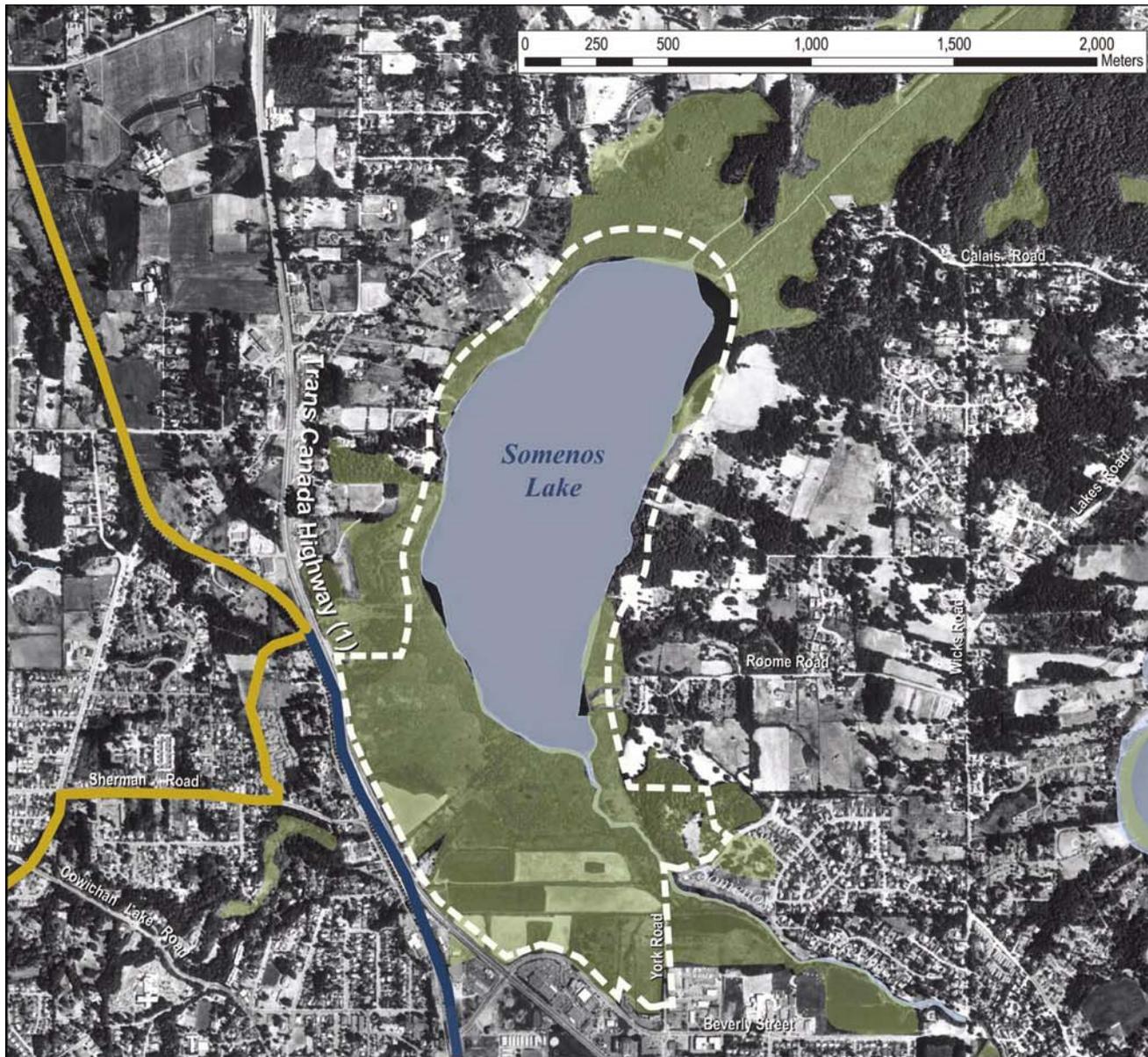
### **Existing Land Ownership**

Private and public forest land.

### **Role**

The collection of peaks and perched lake form a cluster of popular hiking destinations at the sub-alpine level, including the prominence of the highest peak south of Canada's 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. This would be the most remote site for inclusion within the Regional Park system and would provide a near wilderness sub-alpine experience for users.

### **Recommendation:** Tertiary Acquisition



## *Somenos Marsh*



Somenos Marsh is a unique jewel set in the middle of the region and easily accessible by all.

### **Site Characteristics**

Somenos Marsh is a regionally unique landscape set adjacent to an urbanizing and developing area of the CVRD. The marsh is known for its highly productive wetland system, as well as surrounding sensitive ecosystems including Garry oak woodland, old forest, riparian areas and seasonally flooded agriculture fields. The site is culturally significant for First Nations given their long history around Somenos Lake.

### **Location**

The site can be accessed from Trans Canada Highway (1), Drinkwater Road or Roome Road.

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 200 hectares (494 acres).

### **Description**

The area includes five red listed and two blue-listed plant species. It includes the second largest Garry oak in British Columbia.

There are 217 different bird species identified, and the area is a significant rearing and wintering habitat for salmon and trout.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Bird watching, walking, nature study, canoeing/kayaking, fishing and trail linkages to the Cowichan Valley Trail.

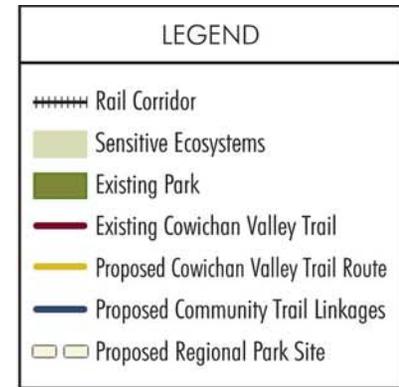
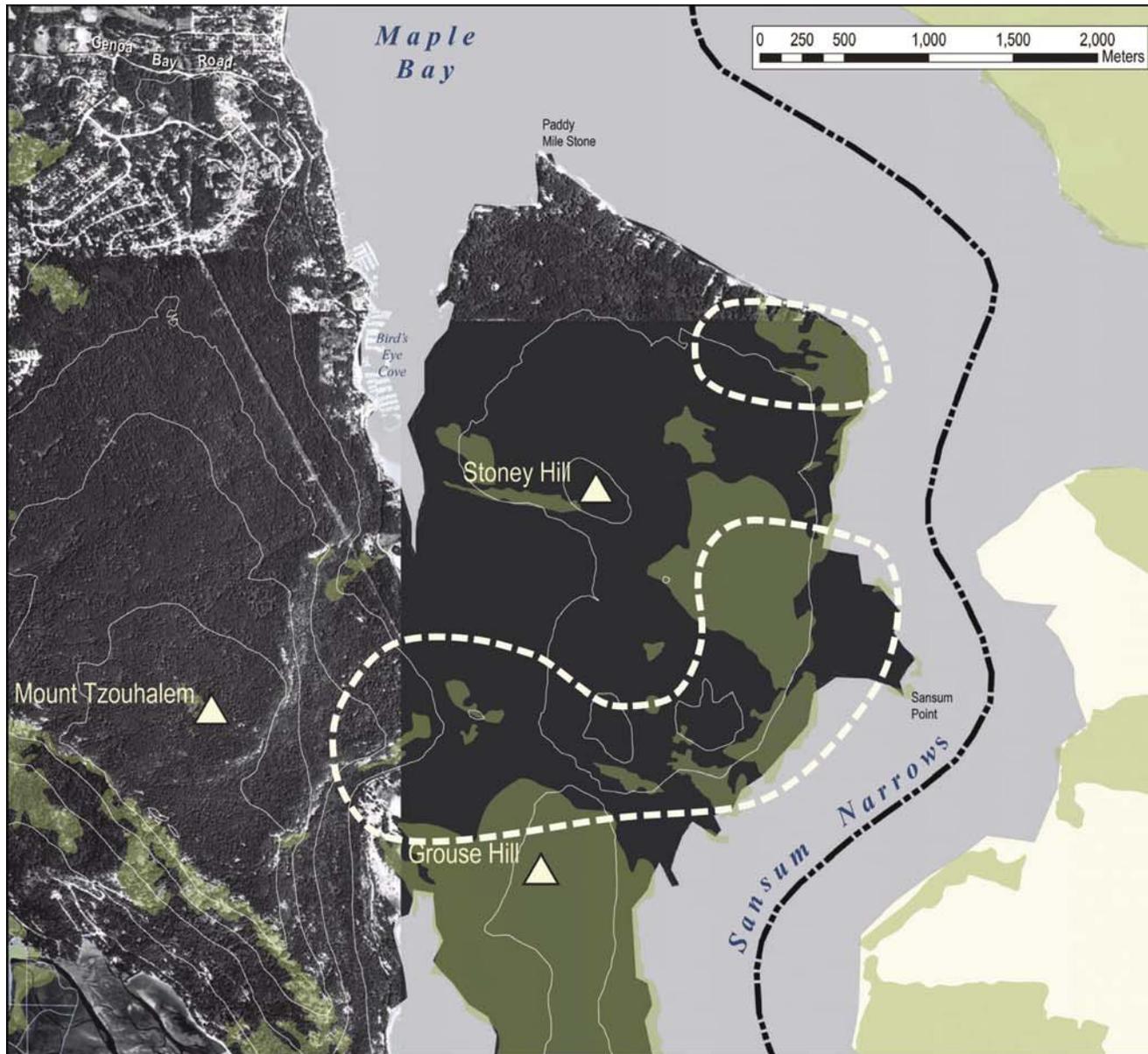
### **Existing Land Ownership**

The Nature Trust of BC, Ducks Unlimited Canada, The BC Forest Discovery Centre, North Cowichan and private lands.

### **Role**

The existing management structure for Somenos Marsh is well established. It involves a variety of agencies and the non-profit Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society. The Regional District role will be to formalize connectivity to the Cowichan Valley Trail to the west and pursue long-term acquisition of additional uplands around the marsh.

**Recommendation:** Tertiary Acquisition



## *Stoney Hill / Sansum Narrows*



With views across to Saltspring Island Stoney Hill provides excellent walking and viewing opportunities.

### **Site Characteristics**

The Stoney Hill/Sansum Narrows area includes a significant section of environmentally sensitive coastal bluff ecosystem, as well as older second growth forest, terrestrial herbaceous, woodland, older forest and wetland areas. Sansum Narrows is an important hydrological feature within the Strait of Georgia and provides popular ocean-based recreational opportunities.

### **Location**

Located within the Municipality of North Cowichan overlooking Sansum Narrows and Saltspring Island.

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 240 hectares (593 acres).

### **Description**

This coastal waterfront site is home to Arbutus, Garry Oak, Douglas-fir, wildflowers and native cacti. The coastal shoreline also provides habitat for rock scallops, trumpet sponges, nudibranches, corals, sea lilies and anemones.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Diving, Kayaking, boating, hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, fishing, scuba diving and picnicking.

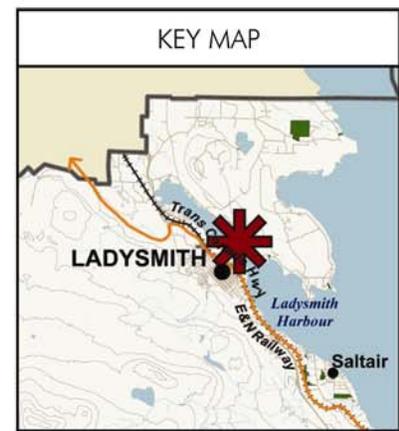
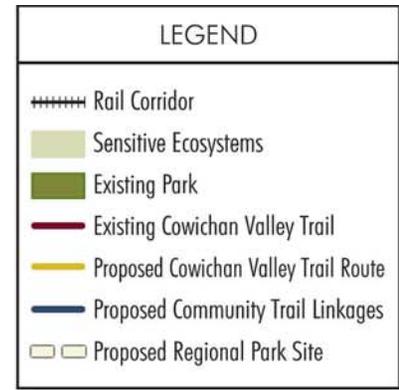
### **Existing Land Ownership**

Most of the lands are located on private land and Municipal Forest Reserve of North Cowichan. Many of the coastal areas and several sensitive ecosystems are outside the forest reserve lands and have no protection or guaranteed longevity.

### **Role**

Sansum Narrows provides a spectacular area for hiking and access for water-based recreation within the more protected water areas of Sansum Narrows, including diving. There is an opportunity to work with North Cowichan to provide an expanded hiking trail network incorporating areas of the Stoney Hill Municipal Forest Reserve lands.

**Recommendation:** Primary Acquisition



## *Ladysmith Harbour Islands*



Woods Island is primary water view for Ladysmith residents. Access may provide walking and picnicking opportunities.

### **Site Characteristics**

The Ladysmith Harbour Islands provide the natural backdrop for the Town of Ladysmith. The islands, including Woods Island are uninhabited.

### **Location**

The Islands sit off the North Shore of Ladysmith Harbour. Access is by water only.

### **Size**

Further boundary definition would be required to confirm extents of the park area.

### **Description**

The islands provide beautiful, scenic, undisturbed and natural ocean views from the north and both the east and west upland areas of Ladysmith Harbour. The Islands are home to unusual ecosystems including occurrence of Rocky Mountain Juniper and spring wildflowers. There is little disturbance caused by humans, and no known inventory of existing plants.

The Islands provide nesting habitat for birds with minimal human disturbance.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Kayaking, small boating, walking, swimming, picnicking, bird watching and marine mammal viewing.

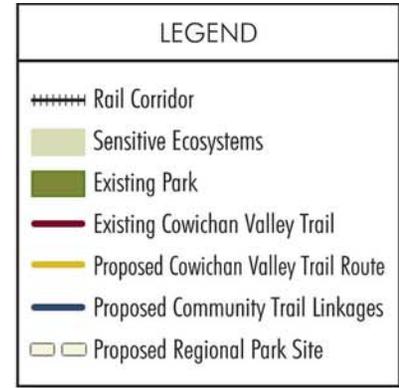
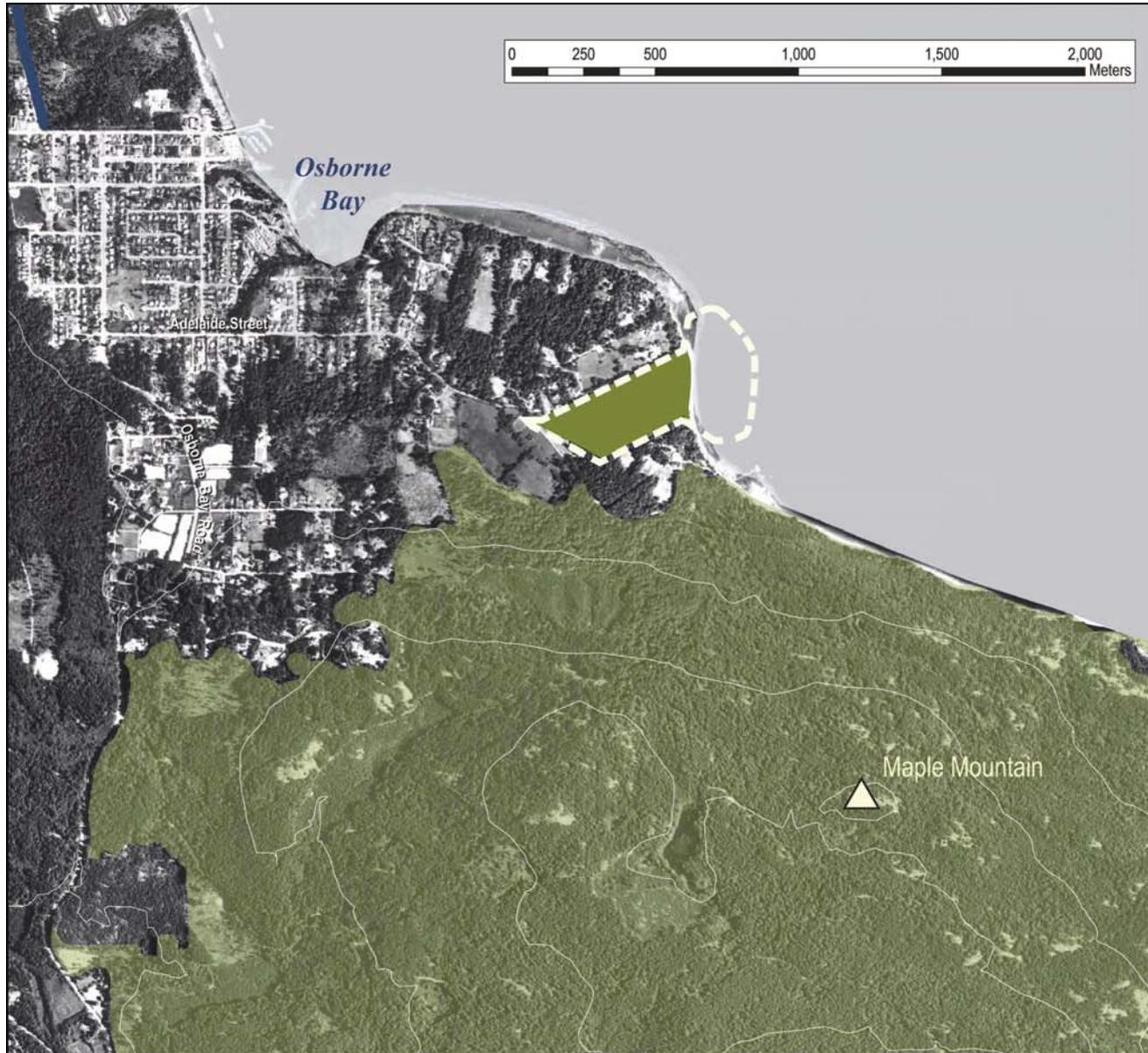
### **Existing Land Ownership**

The islands are owned privately and water lot leases for log booms are also in place. The Town of Ladysmith owns the foreshore lands along Slag Point.

### **Role**

The Islands within Ladysmith Harbour provide an excellent protected water destination and are significant features within the harbour. The slag Point foreshore provides a linkage to the Ladysmith Harbour Islands.

**Recommendation:** Secondary Acquisition



## *Osborne Bay (Reclassification)*

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The nature trails in Osborne Bay Park lead visitors to the ocean shoreline.

### **Site Characteristics**

Osborne Bay Park provides access to the coastal waterfront of the Cowichan Valley. Existing trails and stairs provide access to the shoreline and the water.

### **Location**

Osborne Bay overlooks Satellite Channel and Saltspring Island off Smith Road.

### **Proposed Regional Park Size**

Approximately 25 hectares (62 acres).

### **Description**

The park contains a small number of recreational facilities including picnic tables, trails, benches, parking and a caretaker's cottage.

The park is representative of the marine coastal landscape. It does not incorporate sensitive ecosystems or blue or red listed species.

### **Recreation Opportunities**

Kayaking, boating, hiking, fishing, diving and picnicking.

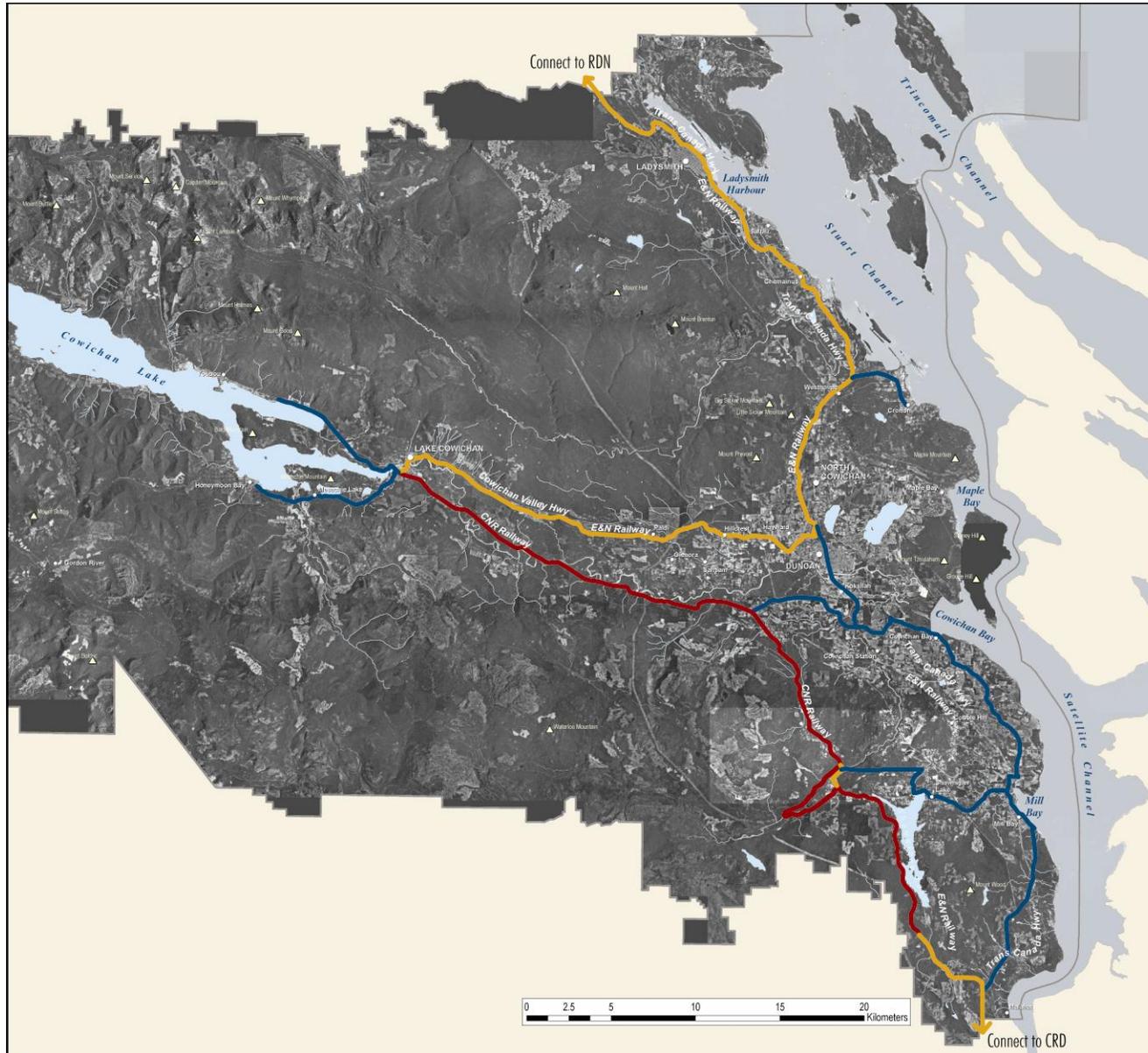
### **Existing Land Ownership**

Osborne Bay Park is owned by the CVRD but is currently managed by the District of North Cowichan under a long-term lease agreement. The municipality assumed an operational role at a time when the CVRD did not have a functioning parks department to develop and manage the site under the Regional Parks Program.

### **Role**

Osborne Bay Park provides coastal waterfront access. Although currently managed by the Municipality of North Cowichan this park is part of the Regional Park system.

**Recommendation:** Tertiary Acquisition



| LEGEND |                                |
|--------|--------------------------------|
|        | CVRD Boundary                  |
|        | Rail Corridor                  |
|        | Existing Cowichan Valley Trail |
|        | Future Cowichan Valley Trail   |
|        | Community Trail Linkages       |



## Regional Trails – Cowichan Valley Trail



The Cowichan Valley Trail has been the key focus of the CVRD Regional Parks & Trails for the past decade. As a strongly supported initiative, work on the trail will continue to progress in linking communities across the region with this regional trail network.

### Site Characteristics

The Cowichan Valley Trail initiative has been part of the CVRD Regional Parks and Trails system for nearly a decade. Its development has garnered strong support from the regional community and is well used by both residents and visitors in the Cowichan Valley. The CVT uses extensive portions of former rail beds, and proposed extensions within the existing E&N Railway corridor as a “Rail with Trail”, creating a significant link to Vancouver Island’s railway history.

### Size

The primary route for Cowichan Valley Trail is approximately 140 km.

Secondary Trail Connections linking regional communities cover about 75 km.

### Access

Numerous access points throughout the Region and connections to numerous CVRD communities.

### Recreation Opportunities

Walking, cycling, mountain biking, equestrian trail riding, nature appreciation and historical interpretation.

### Existing Land Ownership

The CVRD, Island Corridor Foundation, Ministry of Transportation, and private landowners make up the ownership of the existing and future trail routes.

### Role

The trail system provides for both local trail recreation and recreation tourism as the Cowichan Region’s contribution to the Trans Canada Trail Route. The trail route features significant wooden trestles and numerous landscape types. The westernmost point of the Trans Canada Trail reaches out to the Town of Lake Cowichan. The trail initiative “links communities” in the Region through a regional trail network, enhancing recreational trail use, recreational tourist development opportunities and non-motorized commuter use.

**Recommendation:** Primary Acquisition



## 7.0 Park Management and Stewardship

This section of the Plan presents park management and stewardship principles and policies that will apply generally to all parks and trails in the Regional system. The purpose of these policies is to ensure that acceptable standards of environmental protection, risk management, operation and maintenance are applied in all of the Regional Parks and Trails. These stewardship policies and actions should enhance the character, quality and safety of parks and trails.

### 7.1 Regional Park and Trail Management Plans

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As new regional parks are commissioned, the ongoing maintenance and stewardship of each new park site will be directed by an individual park management plan. A park or trail management plan is a document developed to oversee the activities of an individual park given the natural resources, environmental values, designated purpose, aspirations of the community and the available resources of the CVRD.

Once a new Regional Park or Trail is acquired, a Management Plan will be completed to give direction for land management before any significant development of new or upgraded facilities and services occurs in the park. The Management Plan will be approved and adopted by the Regional Board for each Regional Park and Trail.

A Regional Park/Trail Management Plan should, at a minimum, cover topics including:

- Purpose of the plan.
- Public response and input.
- Inventory – biophysical, archaeological, historical, cultural and recreational.
- Environmental and cultural protection measures.
- Suitability assessment – types of outdoor recreational uses that are compatible and where they are permitted.
- Service types and levels.
- Site plan – boundaries, location of facilities, etc.
- Implementation strategy – prioritizing management actions with a schedule and budget.

Regional Park and Trail Management Plans will be reviewed and revised as needed to accommodate new information, opportunities and changes in direction.

### *Stakeholder Consultations*

As individual management plans are prepared, additional stakeholder consultations will be required in conjunction with each plan.

**To encourage meaningful consultations, Regional Park Management Plans will identify a process for formalizing a dialogue between the CVRD and the individual stakeholders, as well as developing a protocol to address interests in the acquisition and/or use of the lands for recreational purposes.**

### *Park Zoning*

Park management zones allow parkland to be defined and managed according to its environmental and/or cultural features and the relative sensitivity of those features to public recreational use. These zones reflect the capacity of parkland to accommodate different intensities of use. Typical zones are “intensive recreation use”, “natural environment” and “conservation”.

**Regional Park Management Plans will employ park management zones to define different levels of public use within the park, to protect the ecological integrity and special environmental and cultural features of a park, and to reduce conflicts between protection and public use.**

## 7.2 Environmental Protection

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Parks and trails often contain valuable natural, historical, archaeological or cultural features that may be sensitive to disturbance. These features and their protection are addressed in this section under the umbrella of “environmental” protection.

The CVRD is at a critical stage where small changes can have significant impacts on the long-term vitality of a park’s natural ecosystem and its historic/cultural features. Increased public awareness and a general desire to allow for outdoor recreation in a way that does not threaten ecological integrity presents both challenges and opportunities to park and trail management.

**The CVRD will apply the most current “Environmental Best Management Practices for Urban and Rural Land Development in BC”, for planning park facilities and managing operations in Regional Parks and Trails.**

### 7.3 Facilities and Improvements

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There is potentially a wide range of facilities and improvements that could be made to cater to many different uses.

**The CVRD will accommodate only those improvements required to support appropriate activities within Regional Parks and Trails. The choice of such improvements will be as set out in the specific Regional Park or Trail Management Plan.**

#### *Standards*

The CVRD intends to provide essential facilities in a recognized standard of quality. The CVRD uses recognized standards (e.g., BC Parks and Parks Canada design standards) in planning and construction of park and trail facilities.

The CVRD is preparing design standards to provide a consistent guideline for all parks and trail improvements. These guidelines will address such things as:

- landscape modification,
- trails and footpaths,
- parking,
- picnic tables,
- pit toilets,
- washrooms,
- camping sites,
- boat ramps, and
- launching facilities.

The CVRD will compile a design standards document that addresses typical park facilities in both regional and community parks and trails. All parks improvements will require the preparation of design details.

#### *'Low-Maintenance' Design and Development*

The construction and maintenance of outdoor facilities can have a variety of impacts. The management of these activities should be undertaken in a way that minimizes impact on the natural

environment. In recent years a variety of new tools, techniques and equipment have been developed to modify past practices to reduce the overall impact of new facilities and reduce life cycle costs.

**The CVRD will develop park services and facilities with low maintenance objectives in mind.**

Park facilities will be designed to reduce the requirement for ongoing maintenance through a variety of means, including:

- Providing trails that respond to user desire lines;
- Developing facilities that are robust and vandal-resistant;
- Developing vegetation management plans that match the surrounding natural areas and use native plant material;
- Coordinating park design with stormwater management plans, and developing park designs that support stormwater management objectives;
- Designing, building and managing facilities in high use areas such as park entrances and picnic areas to have a high quality, professional appearance;
- Constructing facilities in areas outside high use zones to a more rustic level; and
- Ensuring all improvements are developed to require minimum ongoing maintenance and provide high resistance to vandalism, to help reduce maintenance and operations costs.

## 7.4 Barrier-free Access

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Barrier-free access refers to facilities being safe for use by people with physical disabilities. Barrier-free access has become a standard in the construction of buildings, public right of ways (sidewalks, street crossings, etc.) and other public spaces. Defining standards for barrier-free access to the outdoors, given the challenges presented by topography, natural surfaces and environmental, cultural and historic sensitivity, is still being improved on an international scale. Within these constraints, however, the CVRD wants to improve accessibility where the level of use is high and natural conditions allow.

**The CVRD will endeavour to provide barrier-free access within Regional Parks and Trails in high use areas and areas close to communities, recognizing the limitations of topography, environmental, cultural and historic sensitivity and costs.**

## 7.5 Risk Management

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The CVRD recognizes that for all park and trail lands that it acquires or manages under lease or use agreements, it is an occupier of land and therefore, subject to the conditions of the *Occupiers Liability Act* which states:

*“An occupier of premises (including land) owes a duty to take care that in all circumstances...a person and his property on the premises, and the property on the premises of a person, whether or not that person himself enters the premises, will be reasonably safe in using the premises.”*

### *Public Safety*

The CVRD recognizes that risk management has become a strong influence in the management of parks and trails. Liability concerns play an important role in management decisions regarding lands made available for public use, but they cannot completely overshadow other public interests. The CVRD will promote a sense of personal responsibility on the part of all parks and trail users.

**The CVRD will design and maintain park facilities and improvements to optimize public safety, reduce exposure to liability and enhance the public’s recognition of natural hazards and sensitivity to the natural character and quality of experience within the park and trail environment.**

Risk management begins with inspection and documentation of conditions in a park or trail for the purpose of increasing public safety and minimizing liability. For this purpose, the CVRD should adopt a Park Inspection Policy that provides a systematic approach to inspecting and documenting potential hazards and actions required and taken to address these hazards.

**The CVRD will employ the measures set forth in its Park Inspection Policy to implement risk management in its Regional Parks and Trails.**

### *Emergency Planning*

Planning for emergencies includes assessing the need for equipment, facilities and training for natural and human-made emergency situations – e.g., forest fires, floods, land slides and rescues.

**The CVRD will incorporate an Emergency Plan in Regional Park and Regional Trail Management Plans.**

## 7.6 Park Signage and Information

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Better information about Regional Parks and Trails was identified in the public questionnaire as the most important aspect of the system needing improvement. There were many suggestions for improvements, but the main focus was improved directional signage to and within parks and trails, and better brochures with maps that can be downloaded from the CVRD's website.

Signs are an integral component of facilities development, information, promotion and education within a parks and trails system. A coordinated signage plan can provide detailed direction on the implementation of signs, including:

- **Type** – directional, entrance, information, regulation and interpretation.
- **Location** –location of signs within Regional Parks and Trails.
- **Use** – the need for high visibility (e.g., entranceways, roadside) for daily use versus low visibility signage (e.g., backcountry trail) for occasional use.
- **Upgrading** – maintenance of signs in high use versus low use parks/trails.
- **Volunteer Support** – volunteer expertise can be used to enhance any signage program. With guidance on design criteria and specifications, and provision of basic materials, budding or retired carpenters and builders are often keen to construct signs and take great care and pride in their products. They can offer suggestions on ways of keeping costs down while maintaining quality and robustness.

**The CVRD will develop a comprehensive Regional Park and Trail Signage and Information Plan.**

**The CVRD will allocate resources to improve awareness and understanding of the Regional Park and Trail system.**

## 7.7 Visitor and Group Use

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The CVRD maintains its parks and trails for appropriate activities identified in this plan and in individual Regional Park Management Plans. The CVRD does not, in general, develop or maintain parks for occasional 'high volume' demands or specific requirements for short-term special events.

The CVRD recognizes that there is a growing demand for a variety of recreational uses on public lands and can issue "special use permits" under the Park Use Regulation Bylaw for special events in Regional Parks and Trails.

In keeping with the Park Use Regulation Bylaw, the CVRD may allow for the use of a park or trail by an organization or non-profit group for a special event provided that the use is compatible with the purpose and management of the particular site, and the group accepts full responsibility for maintaining and restoring the existing conditions of the site during and after the event.

## 7.8 Education

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Responses to the public questionnaire were emphatic about the role of the park and trail system in promoting greater awareness and appreciation of the Region's environmental, historical, archaeological and cultural values. Education can also support risk management in informing park and trail users of hazards and safe use. Finally, education programs can help to generate revenue to support the park and trail system.

Measures for facilitating the educational role of Regional Parks and Trails include:

- Interpretive signage,
- Interpretive tours (revenue generation opportunity),
- Student courses – school day, weekend, and week-long programs,
- Information and presentations within the school system, and
- Seasonal information kiosks run by volunteers.

The CVRD will promote the use of Regional Parks and Trails as educational venues by:

- **Exploring the use of parks and the development of curriculum-based programs with School Districts 68 and 69 and Malaspina University-College;**
- **Encouraging proposals from eco-education/tourism operators for programs in Regional Parks;**
- **Working with community groups and individuals in developing interpretive trails and tours; and**
- **Working with the forest companies in developing forestry interpretation signs along trails through their lands.**

## 7.9 Human Resources

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The enrichment of the CVRD Regional Parks and Trails Program relies on broad public involvement and support across the regional community, with dedicated volunteers and advocates as well as skilled employees. The achievements of the Regional Parks Program rely upon the broad level of efforts by many volunteers, community partners, contractors, CVRD staff, members of the Regional Services Committee and others.

### *Employees*

The CVRD Parks employees provide core professional services for the administration and management of all aspects of acquisition, development and operational coordination of Regional Parks and the Community Parks in the CVRD's nine electoral areas. Staff resources will be periodically reviewed to ensure the vision, purpose and objectives of the Regional Parks and Trails program are achieved in an efficient and effective manner. To retain highly motivated and skilled staff requires ongoing training and skill development opportunities that are relevant to the technical and professional duties.

### *Volunteers*

The Regional Parks and Trails system would not be where it is today without the efforts of many volunteers, both collectively and individually. Volunteers are not an "option"; they are a vital and necessary component of the parks and trails system if it is to continue to thrive and expand to meet the demands of the regional community.

### **Volunteer Programs**

The effectiveness of volunteerism will be greatly improved and the resulting benefits expanded through a more organized system of volunteer programs. These programs will provide a significant 'value-added' to the Regional Park and Trail function. The following are examples of volunteer programs that can be held in the CVRD:

- **Volunteer Park and Trail Wardens** hike in a designated park at least once a week, educating visitors about park conservation and bylaws, providing maps and advice and reporting on maintenance issues.
- **Naturalists** answer questions, provide information on local flora and fauna and work as members of a team to share their love of parks.

- **Community Service Volunteers** give their time to remove invasive plants. They may also clean up garbage and debris left behind in parks or undertake planting projects. These groups may include schools, Guides, Scouts, businesses and hiking clubs.
- **Gatekeepers** help keep parks safe and secure by opening and closing park gates and providing other daily services as required (i.e. unlocking washrooms).
- **Special Projects Volunteers** use their skills to assist staff with specific projects such as biological inventories, research or construction projects.
- **Work Experience Volunteers** contribute skills, time and energy in exchange for valuable work experience. These placements are available for people enrolled in school or employment programs.
- **Project Volunteers** contribute skills in design, construction or artistry to make signs, build footpaths and boardwalks or design interpretive materials.
- **Event Volunteers** can run seasonal concessions, conduct tours and organize and conduct special events. Many of these activities can generate revenues for the parks and trails system.

### **Volunteer Coordination and Recognition**

While the benefits of volunteerism can be many, working with volunteers requires a substantial investment in staff time to coordinate and develop. Some examples of the tasks that are required to successfully implement a multi-faceted volunteer program include:

- Responding to telephone queries from residents about CVRD volunteer opportunities;
- Providing program information and follow-up;
- Meeting with school groups, conservation organizations, sports associations and individuals to discuss needs and opportunities;
- Providing information about Regional District resources and priorities that support or direct volunteer efforts;
- Developing awards or other volunteer recognition programs;
- Documenting the benefits provided by volunteers and reporting back to the CVRD Board about effectiveness and program priorities; and
- Liaising with school districts to coordinate facility use and development.

A commitment by the CVRD is required to support volunteers through training, supervision and by providing equipment, as well as safety and liability coverage. To expand the participation of volunteers interested in participating in the development and management of the Regional Parks and Trails program requires a coordinated effort by CVRD Staff.

**The CVRD will allocate staff resources to coordinate volunteer programs and recognize contributions throughout the Regional Parks and Regional Trails System.**

### *Corporate Supporters*

Corporate sponsors can contribute and support Regional Park and Trail development on numerous levels.

**The CVRD will work with interested corporate supporters who wish to contribute and support Regional Park environmental habitat improvement projects, parkland acquisitions and new park facility development within the Regional Parks and Trails system.**

### *Educational Institutions*

School Districts 79 and 68 use areas of ecological and recreational value as part of their educational curriculum. There may be opportunities to collaborate on the development of educational tools and programs within Regional Parks and Trails. Also, school groups can be enthusiastic participants in parks and trails projects.

**The CVRD will develop relationships with school districts in working towards common priorities in outdoor recreation and education programs.**

## **7.10 Funding for Site Acquisition**

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The authority to fund acquisition, development, operation and maintenance of regional parks is authorized through CVRD Bylaw No. 1930 – “Regional Parks Extended Services Establishment Bylaw”, adopted by the CVRD Board in 1999. The bylaw is supplementary to establishment of the Regional Parks Service by the CVRD under Letters Patent authority granted by the Province in 1972. Under Bylaw No. 1930, the Regional Parks Service participants include the four municipalities of the Town of Lake Cowichan, City of Duncan, Town of Ladysmith and the District of North Cowichan, and the nine electoral Areas A, B, C, D, E, F G, H and I.

The CVRD Board annually determines the priorities and level of funds available for expenditure under the Regional Parks Program. In 2006 the Regional Parks tax requisition was approved by the Board was \$174,147 that amounted to a tax assessment of \$3.40 per the average assessed value of \$200,000 of households within the Cowichan Region. Funds in 2006 were primarily spent on the

ongoing maintenance and minor upgrading work along existing sections of the Cowichan Valley Trail, maintenance of Sandy Pool Regional Park and minor work on the Kinsol Trestle initiative.

### *Regional Parks and Trails Acquisition Resources*

Regional Parkland acquisition can occur through the following:

- transfer of lands from non-government organizations and other levels of government;
- private gifts and/or bequests;
- dedications (as part of land development or subdivision approvals); or
- fee purchase agreements.

Rights of management of lands under the Regional Parks and Trails Program may also be secured as right-of-ways, easements, lease agreements or other such legally binding arrangements. Federal and Provincial tax incentives are also available to private landowners who may be encouraged to donate lands for Regional Parks or Regional Trail corridors that achieve the vision, principles and objectives of the plan.

It is expected the opportunities to acquire lands under the Regional Parks and Trails Program will generally exceed budgeted funds and therefore the Regional Board will need to be strategic in the investment of such funds. A key objective of the CVRD Regional Parks Program is to actively seek partnerships and to have financial leveraging arrangements made with other levels of governments, grant funding organizations, land trusts, community groups and developers to secure acquisition of lands for regional parks. This approach expands the opportunities to achieve the land acquisition strategy priorities of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.

The Plan recognizes that timing of lands becoming available for acquisition by the Regional District may be influenced by a number of factors including funding availability (both CVRD and external funding partnership arrangements such as grants and fundraising campaigns), coordination with other levels of government and willingness or needs of the landowner. Lands to be acquired under the CVRD Regional Parks and Trails Program will be consistent with the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan. To achieve this objective, the Plan recommends establishment of one or more of the following programs to support the Regional Parks Program objectives.

### *Regional Parkland Acquisition Fund*

An approach used successfully by several Regional Districts across British Columbia to raise funds specifically for the purchase of lands for regional parks is the creation of a special property 'tax' or

levy for regional parkland acquisition purposes. CVRD Parks has the capacity to establish such a special tax under the existing Regional Parks Program and the funds annually generated would be applied towards land acquisition opportunities that arise for proposed regional park sites identified in the Plan. Support for such a special tax for parkland acquisition purposes was expressed by 76% of respondents to the CVRD region-wide 2006 household survey on Regional Parks and Trails. The public also expressed strong support for a regional parkland acquisition fund during the CVRD Regional Parks and Trail Master Plan fall public open houses.

The Regional Parkland Acquisition Fund would be maintained separately from the annual budget to operate the Regional Parks and Trails System, with expenditure of the funds only on land purchased for Regional Parks and Trails. The funds accumulated will be dependent upon the rate established and the duration of the tax, which will require direction and approval from the Regional Board.

**The CVRD will create a Regional Parkland Acquisition Fund to support the land acquisition objectives of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.**

### *Long Term Borrowing Bylaw*

Recognizing the finite and limited capacity for annual budgets to provide the necessary capital funds for significant land purchases, even with a Regional Parkland Acquisition Fund, alternative funding mechanisms must also be considered.

Beyond financial constraints, there is also an issue of equity around the notion of who contributes to and who benefits from regional parks, recognizing the acquisition of lands for parks are for the long-term benefit of the Regional Community for generations to come. In this context, the advantages of a Long Term Borrowing Bylaw with long term amortizations, perhaps twenty years or more, provides the capacity to respond to near term acquisition opportunities without being limited to funds available under the current year's budget.

While the total cost of borrowing may be greater through Long Term Borrowing, an advantage is the capacity to spread out repayments over a number of budget years versus a "pay-as-you go" approach which could require significant budget allocation demands of the Board in any given year. A second advantage of Long Term Borrowing is the ability for existing and future residents to contribute proportionally to the acquisition of regional park sites over time. Existing residents are not unnecessarily burdened in the short term with acquisition costs of regional park sites that provide long term outdoor recreation and environmental benefits for the Region as a whole. Regional Board

approval of a Long Term Borrowing Bylaw to support land acquisition will require public confirmation through an alternative approval process.

**The CVRD Board will provide direction on the establishment of a Long Term Borrowing Bylaw to achieve the land acquisition objectives of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.**

### *Development Cost Charges*

Authorization under the *Local Government Act* permits establishment of development cost charges (DCCs) as monetary charges that local governments can apply to new developments to assist in providing specific services to residents of those new developments. The provision of parks is one of the services for which DCCs can be levied. While park DCCs are commonly applied at the municipal level for municipal and community parks, the application of DCCs has not yet been applied in B.C. for regional parks. This does not preclude consideration by the CVRD from examining the applicability of DCCs for regional parks on future development proposals in within the Region.

### *Donations and Endowments*

The gifting of money or suitable lands through donation or endowment is an attractive option to many who value both opportunities to “give-back” to the local community and may also have taxable benefits through such gifting. An endowment established specifically for the Regional Parks Program can give assurance to prospective donors that their contributions will be used for the purposes that they support. CVRD Parks will examine the establishment of a Regional Parks and Trails Donation/Endowment Fund that would accept gifts for acquisition completing the land acquisition objectives of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan. Such a fund could be further supported and promoted by a volunteer group, with administrative assistance and oversight by CVRD Parks and perhaps expanded to include gifts which could be applied to the provision of park amenities, stewardship or improvements to acquired regional park sites.

## **7.11 Funding for Operations and Amenities**

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The allocation of funds will be annually determined by the CVRD Board for the management, operation and provision of amenities within Regional Parks and Trails. Park Management Plans prepared for individual regional park sites will need to identify proposed amenities and operational requirements and will be subject to review and adoption by the Regional Board following a public consultation process for input into the development of these plans.

The level of funding approved annually by the Regional Board will foremost be applied to the upkeep and safe operation and maintenance service levels of existing Regional Park and Trail amenities as well as debt servicing requirements prior to consideration of the development of new park amenities under the program.

Under the CVRD Regional Parks function in 2006 the operations and amenities program included Sandy Pool Regional Park, sections of the Cowichan Valley Trail and Bright Angel Park (this site is currently funded by Electoral Areas A through E under the Regional Parks function).

For 2007 and in future years the annual budget consideration will be guided in part by the number of new regional park sites acquired under the Regional Parks and Trails Program, the management plans for each new site reviewed and adopted by the Regional Board and for budgetary considerations of the Regional Board as influenced by other funded programs and priorities of the Regional District.

### *Project-specific donations:*

CVRD parks staff have worked with a variety of community groups to seek funding and donations toward specific parks and trails related projects in their communities. Current initiatives to fundraise for the reconstruction/rehabilitation of the Kinsol trestle are an excellent example of the role of project specific fundraising.

**The CVRD will continue to work with volunteers and community groups to promote donations to fund specific projects in the Regional Parks and Trails System.**

### *Commemorative gifts:*

Commemorative gifts can provide a range of opportunities for individual and corporate residents to contribute directly to a park or trail of their choice. These types of gifts help fund operational functions rather than acquisitions. Donations may be in the form of cash for equipment or facilities or as land given for recreational use or environmental protection.

Other local governments have established a variety of targeted gifting options such as \$100 for a recycling station, \$250 for a bicycle rack, \$800 for a picnic table or \$1000 for an interpretive sign. At a corporate level, gifts may include \$20,000+ for public facilities such as washrooms and picnic shelters. Such gifts are typically commemorated by a plaque, label or sign on the item funded.

While this is one method for acquiring equipment and facilities within parks and trails, the downside is the obligation that is created to maintain the item or facility and its commemorative label in the long term.

**The CVRD will explore the establishment of a Commemorative Gifting Program to support specific infrastructure and facilities in Regional Parks and Trails.**



## 8.0 Partnership Opportunities

The establishment of the Regional Parks and Trails network cannot be effectively implemented by the CVRD alone. Regional Districts are most effective when they work with agencies, organizations and residents to fulfill the Regional Parks and Trails mandate. These relationships are becoming increasingly important as public demand for parks and trails generally increases more quickly than the district's financial resources alone can support. The CVRD will foster relationships and expand opportunities for partnerships to secure the land acquisition objectives of the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.

### 8.1 Provincial Government

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#### *Crown Lands*

The Regional District will work proactively with the Province to communicate the details of this Regional Park and Trail Master Plan so that opportunities for Crown land transfers and joint management agreements can be identified with respect to sites identified in the Plan for Regional Parks and/or Trails. Specifically the CVRD will work with the Province to:

- Finalize a comprehensive and accurate inventory of Crown lands within the Regional District that are identified within the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan for acquisition as a Regional Park or Regional Trail.
- Work with Provincial land managers to determine the best methods for achieving tenure of specific Crown lands for Regional Park and Trail purposes, through long-term tenure, free Crown Grant, access agreements, acquisition through future development or through the purchase of lands.
- The CVRD will consult with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management when identifying Crown land for future Regional Park acquisition to ensure that there is no conflict with existing Provincial Land Use Plans.

#### *Provincial Parks and Protected Areas*

The Cowichan Valley Regional District currently manages Spectacle Lake Provincial Park and Chemainus River Provincial Park under a short-term permit with BC Parks.

**The CVRD will pursue viable avenues to secure long-term tenure of both Spectacle Lake Park and Chemainus River Park by the Regional District, as part of the larger Regional Parks acquisitions proposed in the plan.**

### *Provincial Road Rights of Way*

The CVRD makes use of undeveloped road right of ways (ROW) in planning and implementing its trail networks, for which it has received cooperation from district staff at the Ministry of Transportation (MoT).

The MoT's policy is to support local governments development of trails, as this represents a managed use of public access roadways. For this purpose, local governments can apply for, and MoT may issue, permits for trail construction in road ROWs on the understanding that should the Province need the ROW in the future, the permit will be reclaimed. The permits are also issued on the basis that the local government takes on the responsibility for trail management and maintenance, liability for trail use and responsibility for liaising with ROW neighbours.

**The CVRD will continue to work in cooperation with the Ministry of Transportation in planning and developing Regional Trails within provincial road rights of way.**

## 8.2 First Nations

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The CVRD recognizes that lands within the Regional District are subject to aboriginal title interests. Some of these lands are the subject of land claims and may be acquired by First Nations through treaty negotiations with the federal and provincial governments. This may affect some of the lands identified in this Plan, such that they may not be available for future park acquisition.

The CVRD also recognizes that First Nations governments have influence and decision-making powers that can affect the future of the CVRD Parks and Trails system. The success of this Plan may be influenced by how well it works with land use priorities established by adjacent First Nations.

**The CVRD commits to working with First Nations within the Regional District to promote and encourage an understanding of First Nations issues and culture within the Regional Parks and Trails system, and to find common goals in securing lands for Regional Parks and Trails where the interests of the First Nations and the CVRD coincide.**

**Proposed trails that may affect First Nations Reserve lands are subject to the willing agreement and partnership of the related First Nations group.**

### 8.3 Member Municipalities

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In its trail planning, the CVRD endeavours to provide linkages from Regional Trails to municipal/electoral area trail networks to further promote and enhance connectivity of communities across the Region.

**As part of partnerships with municipalities in future park acquisition, the CVRD will be open to shared park development and management where the municipality expresses a desire and ability to do so.**

### 8.4 Neighbouring Regional Districts

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The Capital Regional District to the south, and the Regional District of Nanaimo to the north border the CVRD. Each of these Regional Districts plans for and manages Regional Parks and Trail systems in their respective jurisdictions.

**The CVRD commits to working with its neighbouring Regional Districts to provide continuity among their respective parks and trails systems and to explore opportunities for co-management of contiguous Regional Parks and Trails.**

### 8.5 Private Forest Landowners

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Over the last 10 years, the CVRD Parks staff has developed good working relations in planning and developing trail networks with the primary forest companies that have extensive land holdings in the Regional District. The CVRD also has a good working relationship with the District of North Cowichan. The main issues with these companies are:

- Liability for public uses and activities on their lands; and
- The potential for public “ownership” of developed trails that create conflicts when forest companies intend to harvest, or when access must be temporarily cut off due to fire hazard. Users of trails on these lands must understand that the primary use of the land is forestry.

The CVRD has worked with forest companies on several Regional Trail segments that cross private forest lands (e.g., Cowichan Valley Trail and the TCT Connector to the Capital Regional District) to develop access agreements. Under such agreements, the CVRD can assume responsibility for trail development, maintenance and public use liabilities, thereby adopting the liability for their use.

Future trail development may be addressed in the following ways:

- Through the development and renewal of access agreements associated with regional trails across private forest lands;
- By providing information to the public about the nature of these agreements. Mainly that the areas accessed by trails are managed for forestry use and that the surrounding landscape and the route itself may change over time;
- By working with private forest companies to find trail routes that are accessible to the public and minimize impacts on both forest practices and trail use; and
- By endeavouring to meet with staff from the forest companies on a regular basis to review harvesting plans and coordinate the above activities.

The CVRD will continue to work cooperatively with forest companies and the Municipality of North Cowichan to identify appropriate solutions to support the Regional Park and Trails Plan

## 8.6 Island Corridor Foundation (ICF)

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The CVRD will work with the ICF to identify recreational use opportunities and rail with trail development within the E&N Corridor as part of the Cowichan Valley Trail (Trans Canada Trail) initiative.

## 8.7 Other Landowners

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The CVRD Parks staff have developed good working relationships with several landowners to provide trail access across private lands through “access agreements” in which the CVRD takes on the responsibility for trail development, management and liability.

The CVRD will continue to work cooperatively with private landowners along and adjacent to Regional Parks and Trails.

## 8.8 Conservation Organizations

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The CVRD will collaborate with provincial and regional conservation organizations in acquiring, and subsequently managing Regional Parks such as:

- Ducks Unlimited,

- The Cowichan Community Land Trust,
- The Land Conservancy,
- Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society, and the
- Nature Trust of BC

## 8.9 Community Organizations and User Groups

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Many park trail development projects would not happen without the efforts of local residents, stewardship organizations and volunteer committees. Community service organizations such as the Rotary, Gyro and Kiwanis clubs are traditionally active in their communities in supporting park and trail acquisition and development.

User groups such as hiking and mountaineering clubs, equestrian groups and mountain biking clubs are also enthusiastic supporters and participants of Regional Parks and Regional Trail projects.

The CVRD will continue to work with its existing community and user group partners in the planning and management of Regional Parks and Trails. The CVRD will also endeavour to expand these partnerships to a wider range of organizations to meet the objectives of this Plan.



## *9.0 Appendices*

The following appendices are available in a separate report:

- Appendix A Regional Parks and Trails Mail Out Survey
- Appendix B Mail Out Survey Results
- Appendix C Comments from Spring Open Houses
- Appendix D Sites of Public Interest
- Appendix E Relative and Comparative Assessment of Sites of Public Interest
- Appendix F Public Comments from Fall Open Houses
- Appendix G Stakeholder Consultations
- Appendix H Newspaper Coverage
- Appendix I SWOT Analysis and Regional Parks and Trails Advisory Group Recommendation



**2007 CVRD Regional Services Committee**

Jon Lefebure, *Chair*, District of North Cowichan

Rob Hutchins, *Vice Chair*, Town of Ladysmith

Mike Walker, Mill Bay/Malahat Electoral Area

Ken Cossey, Shawnigan Lake Electoral Area

Gerry Giles, Cobble Hill Electoral Area

Mike Tansley, Cowichan Bay Electoral Area

Loren Duncan, Cowichan Station/Sahtlam/Glenora Electoral Area

Joe Allen, Cowichan Lake South/Skutz Falls Electoral Area

Mel Dorey, Saltair/Gulf Islands Electoral Area

Mary Marcotte, North Oyster/Diamond Electoral Area

Brooke Hodson, Youbou/Meade Creek Electoral Area

Phil Kent, City of Duncan

Glen Ridgway, District of North Cowichan

George Seymour, District of North Cowichan

CVRD Board Chair W.J. (Jack)Peake, Town of Lake Cowichan