

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee

Date: 2025-05-15

From: Sara Vorlicek, Planning Technician

Subject: Parks and Trails Strategic Plan - Project Initiation

Reviewed by: Melissa Geddert, Acting Integrated Planning and Engagement Manager  
Christina Vugteveen, Manager of Parks  
David Urban, Deputy Director of Regional Services  
Stacey Barker, Director of Regional Services/ Deputy CAO  
Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer

---

### RECOMMENDATION

**THAT** the Fraser Valley Regional District Board support the initiation of an update to the Fraser Valley Regional District Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2014-2024.

### BACKGROUND

The Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2014-2024 is a foundational document providing a guiding framework for park classification, park management, priority improvements, and parkland acquisition criteria. The inaugural plan was adopted in 2003, followed by an updated version in 2014. The Regional Parks Strategic Plan outlines a vision and framework to **ensure that the FVRD's Regional Parks and Trails meet the recreational and environmental needs of both residents and visitors.**

The current FVRD Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2014-2024 has a ten-year scope. With that timeframe now complete, the FVRD is proposing to begin the process of developing a new plan to provide continued strategic direction and reflect the changes that have occurred across the Regional Parks system. **Since 2014, the FVRD's park structure has evolved significantly. Additions include the East Sector Lands Recreation Area and the Vedder River Campground.** In 2018, operation of Glen Valley Regional Park, Matsqui Trail Regional Park, and the western flank of Sumas Mountain Regional Park was transferred from Metro Vancouver to the FVRD under a sub-regional service. The past decade has also seen substantial infrastructure upgrades across many parks, along with the establishment of longer-term agreements that secure land tenure for several parks.

In addition to reflecting changes within the Regional Parks system, the updated plan will respond to the growing demand for parks and outdoor recreation, **driven by a heightened awareness of nature's physical and mental health benefits.** This shift has also emphasized the need for sustainable park management, improved infrastructure, and equitable access to outdoor spaces as communities adapt to changing recreation patterns and climate challenges. The updated plan will be more

comprehensive and will take the form of an FVRD Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, encompassing both Regional and Community Parks and Trails.

The inclusion of Community Parks and Trails reflects their increasing significance within the FVRD parks system, particularly due to increased development and the onboarding of new park assets. Incorporating Community Parks and Trails ensures a consistent approach to park planning, management, and service delivery across the region. This integration also responds to strong community demand for local parks and trails, as demonstrated by recent additions such as the Morris Valley Roadside Trail, Lakeside Trail, and expansion of Popkum Linear Park. The updated plan will prioritize goals and actions that support a resilient network of parks and trails, advancing climate adaptation, enhancing community well-being, and providing lasting environmental and recreational benefits for the region.

## DISCUSSION

The Parks and Trails Strategic Plan will provide a comprehensive, long-term vision for the management, development, and sustainability of the FVRD parks system, including Regional Parks and Trails, and Community Parks and Trails. It will establish clear, measurable goals that align with evolving community needs, emerging recreation trends, and environmental considerations. Addressing key challenges such as population growth, climate change, and the need for long-term land use agreements, the plan will also prioritize strategies to enhance park accessibility, expand parkland, and improve visitor experiences.

**Staff recommend extending the plan's timeline to 2050 to align with the Regional Growth Strategy** and provide a more flexible, long-term framework. A longer horizon will ensure the plan remains achievable while supporting the long-term sustainability of the parks system. The updated Plan will establish a clear goal of conducting a review every five to seven years to assess progress, address emerging challenges, and refine priorities as needed. These reviews will include monitoring, and public reporting, allow for minor updates to address emerging trends, challenges and opportunities. By making periodic adjustments through minor updates, this reduces the need for a major update within the shorter term, while keeping the plan relevant and responsive to evolving community and environmental needs.

The development of the Parks Strategic Plan will incorporate a robust public engagement process, ensuring meaningful input from the public, First Nations communities, and member municipalities, as well as other key stakeholders. Early engagement is a priority and will continue through the various **stages of the plan's development**. Through a variety of engagement methods, such as surveys, workshops, and public meetings, the process will gather diverse perspectives, helping to shape a plan that reflects the needs and values of all those using the parks system.

### Park Use Survey

A key component informing the update will be a comprehensive park use survey. Previous iterations of the Regional Parks Strategic Plan were also informed by park use surveys, such as the 2013 FVRD and Metro Vancouver Outdoor Recreation Study. The park use survey will collect valuable data on

visitor demographics, recreation preferences, and park and trail usage patterns. Understanding who uses FVRD parks and trails, how they use them, and what challenges and opportunities exist will help ensure that the FVRD parks system remains accessible, inclusive, and responsive to community needs. The survey will be conducted within FVRD parks and trails and online later this summer.

Since the creation of the 2014-2024 Regional Parks Strategic Plan, social and environmental changes across Canada have reshaped outdoor recreation patterns. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a global surge in park visitation as people sought outdoor spaces for well-being. While some trends have stabilized, others, like increased visitation, demand for trail networks, larger natural areas, and better park facilities, have led to lasting shifts in public preferences. These changes highlight the need to update the plan, ensuring informed decisions on park development, investment, and management. Gathering data on recreation, demographic shifts, emerging technologies, and evolving accessibility needs through the survey will provide insights into how recreation habits and values have changed over the past decade.

### Plan Components

This plan will build on the previous Regional Parks Strategic Plan and include new concepts. The plan will include the following components:

**Vision and Goals:** A refreshed vision for the FVRD parks and trails system that aligns with current community and environmental goals.

**Park Classification:** Parks are categorized into different classes to guide their management and use. In the current plan, parks are classified as Recreation Areas, Natural Areas, and Regional Trails. As part of the updated Plan, these classifications may be expanded to reflect changes in the Regional Park system and align with evolving environmental conservation and park priorities. The plan will also expand the classification framework to include community parks and trails.

**Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities:** The updated plan will examine emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in FVRD parks and trails, using insights from the park use survey. Understanding future recreation demands, visitor needs, and service expectations will help inform management guidelines and planning decisions.

**Objectives and Priorities:** The plan will establish clear objectives and priorities to guide park and trail management, conservation efforts, and recreation investments. These will ensure parks and trails continue to meet community needs, support environmental sustainability, and adapt to emerging trends.

**Management Guidelines:** The Parks Strategic Plan will establish clear management guidelines for FVRD parks and trails, ensuring consistency in park operations, conservation efforts, and visitor experiences. These guidelines will also serve as a foundation for developing individual regional park management plans, outlining key priorities, best practices, and long-term strategies for sustainable park stewardship.

**Land Acquisition Strategy:** The plan will build on the land acquisition criteria outlined in the current Regional Parks Strategic Plan and include a strategic approach to parkland acquisition. The development of a land acquisition strategy is a priority identified in the *FVRD 2023-2026 Strategic Plan*.

**Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:** The plan will include the establishment of performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the plan and the success of its initiatives. Mechanisms for adjusting the plan over time will also be included to address unforeseen challenges or opportunities.

## **COST**

The initiation of the FVRD Parks and Trails Strategic Plan planning process will incur costs related to staff time, public engagement activities, and consultant services for the park use survey. This year, \$50,000 of funding has been allocated in the 2025 budget process. The 2025-2029 financial plan for these budgets also reflects \$150,000 of funding for this work next year in 2026.

## **CONCLUSION**

Staff are proposing to initiate an update of the Regional Parks Strategic Plan as the current plan's 2014-2024 term has concluded. The updated plan will be more comprehensive and will take the form of an FVRD Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, encompassing all parks and trails under the FVRD Parks Service. The updated plan will set clear, measurable goals for the long-term management and sustainability of the FVRD parks system, and will address considerations such as increased visitation, population growth, climate change, and evolving community needs. A park use survey will gather data on park usage, demographics, and recreation preferences to inform planning decisions. Stakeholder and public engagement will ensure the plan reflects community input and addresses both recreational needs and conservation goals. The new Plan will extend to 2050 and incorporate changes over the last decade to the Regional Park system, and allowing for flexible, long-term planning and regular public reporting. Key components of the update include refining park classifications, establishing management guidelines, and developing a Land Acquisition Strategy to support future parkland acquisitions.