

Regional Parks & Trails Policy Report



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT

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ALBERNI -CLAYOQUOT REGIONAL DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

A common theme throughout all the member communities of Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District is the high value put on the natural environment and the outdoor recreation opportunities which it provides. It is consistently ranked by residents as one of the most important benefits of living here; it is why many of our visitors are drawn to the area; and it is becoming increasingly important to our economic well-being.

The region is fortunate in having a range of outdoor opportunities - in parks and trails operated by different levels of government and in the forest lands which are such a predominant feature of the landscape. But much of this tends to be taken for granted. At present, Alberni- Clayoquot Regional District has only two regional parks – a situation which has not changed in over twenty years. To date, there has been no systematic overview of outdoor recreation in the regional district and little discussion about whether there is a role for an increased level of regional recreation.

If these values are important to us and if they are something worth conserving, it is important to take the time to stand back, look at the big picture and plan ahead before we are overtaken by development pressures and opportunities which exist now are closed off.

It is hoped that this policy paper will take the first step in that discussion and help point the way forward.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

From discussions with rural area directors and advisory planning commissions, it is clear that there is a definite interest in looking further at an increased role for regional parks and trails. At the same time, however, there is widespread awareness that there are many issues to be considered, that the regional district has limited resources and care must be taken not to take on more than can be managed. The message might best be characterized as, “Move forward, but with caution.”

Full recommendations and the rationale for them are outlined in the section under “Next Steps” at the end of the report. The following is a brief summary:

1. ONGOING :

1.1 Continue with initiatives on existing regional parks :

Mount Arrowsmith – Continue discussions with the Regional District of Nanaimo on taking over management.

China Creek – No change in the park’s present role a passive beach recreation area and a base for the sports fishery.

2. MOVING FORWARD - LONGTERM

It is suggested that the region consider a “multi-pronged” approach to moving forward:

2.1 Fill in the big picture - complete an overall plan/vision for regional parks and trails

It is important to move forward and make decisions with the best inventory and knowledge base possible. Some of base information is already available, but there are gaps. There should be a process for public participation, both in determining areas of recreational and environmental importance and in establishing what people are prepared to pay for an increased level of parks and trails service. In the Alberni Valley, this could be done as part of the “visioning” process for upcoming official community plan reviews. In Long Beach and Bamfield, an afternoon or evening workshop could be held.

2.2 From the planning process, establish long-term, prioritized objectives

This should:

- determine which areas and trail corridors should be come under a “regional” designation;
- establish their relative importance on a scale of high, medium and low;
- set out standards & levels of maintenance (e.g. for parks, passive or active; for trails, level of difficulty);
- identify potential partners and most appropriate method(s) of implementation for each.

2.3 Establish the best administrative “delivery vehicle”

Determine whether administration will be the responsibility of the regional district or whether it should be shared with a non-profit group, such as a trails society, with financial support from the regional district.

2.4 Put in place the financing

It is recommended that surplus funds from Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park be used as capital fund to enable the regional district to provide leveraging funds for land acquisition, grant applications for construction and signage, or similar projects.

An annual amount should also be budgeted for maintenance and administrative costs, the amount to be finalized after the planning process is complete.

3. MOVING FORWARD - SHORTTERM

In the short term, undertake small-scale projects in each of the three sub-regions on a trial basis

While long-term objectives will fall out of the planning process, there are two small-scale initiatives - one in the Alberni Valley and one in Long Beach - which have emerged as early priorities. It is suggested that these should be viewed as “trial runs” while inventories are completed and longer term options considered.

3.1 It is recommended that the CNPR Inlet Trail be designated as a “regional trail” and that negotiations be started on a trail use agreement.

3.2 It is recommended that the Willowbrae park site be designated as a “regional park” and developed for a picnic area and car-top boat launch.

3.3 Obtain input from Bamfield residents for a similar small-scale initiative in their community.

WHAT ARE REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS?

Regional Districts throughout British Columbia have been providing regional parks and trails services since the late 1960's. The extent to which this has been done varies from one regional district to another and the terms of reference under which each operates is likewise tailored to their individual needs.

Regional parks can have a variety of roles, but their focus is on meeting the outdoor recreation needs of the region as a whole, complementing the more localized park functions of individual electoral areas or municipalities which are met through the community parks system. They may encompass larger areas of land than the local system; they frequently have an emphasis on more passive outdoor recreational pursuits; they may meet the need of a specific outdoor recreation user group; frequently environmental stewardship of representative landscapes or ecosystems is also a feature. Increasingly, trails are becoming a more prominent part of regional parks systems, whether providing linkages between parks and features of interest or to provide pedestrians and cyclists with "green" transportation alternatives.

Legislative Basis for Regional Parks and Trails

Legislative authority to provide a regional park and trails service derives from the Local Government Act. The act is flexible in the methods by which a regional district can obtain an interest in land for parks purposes; these range from outright ownership to lease, permit, easement etc.

Designation of a specific site or corridor as a "regional" park or trail is done by motion of the Regional Board. Once an area is formally designated, it becomes covered by the regional district's standard liability insurance under the Municipal Insurance Association.

In keeping with their regional role, regional parks and trails are financed by the regional district as a whole – both municipalities and electoral areas.

Other Types of Parks or Trail

Community and Municipal Parks

Community and municipal parks are much more localized in scope, providing features like children's play areas, tennis courts or trails designed to serve their immediate neighbourhood. They are funded solely by the electoral area or municipality in which they are located. Funding or land dedication is obtained in part through the parkland dedication/cash-in-lieu requirement of the subdivision process.

Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District operates community park commissions in Sproat Lake and Bamfield electoral areas, both of which have small neighbourhood parks; Sproat Lake has also begun work on a community trail system. Cherry Creek and Beaver Creek electoral areas have recreation commissions operating under their local improvement districts, with neighbourhood parks in each.

ACRD also has responsibility for the Log Train Trail. This is not a regional trail, but is operated under lease from the Ministry of Transportation.

The City of Port Alberni owns and operates the McLean Mill National Historic in Beaufort Electoral Area and two small riverside parks in Sproat Lake Electoral Area – Somass River Park on the Somass and Seaton Park on the Sproat River. The latter are passive parks, mainly used by sports fishermen.

The City of Port Alberni and the Districts of Tofino and Ucluelet have their own municipal park and recreation programs within their boundaries

Provincial and National Parks

Provincial and national parks manage and conserve areas of environmental or cultural significance on a provincial or national level and frequently include campsites and day use areas for visitors.

Sproat Lake, Stamp Falls and Fossli Provincial parks within the Alberni Valley are all popular with residents and visitors. The southern section of Strathcona Provincial Park, including Della Falls and Oshinow Lake, lies inside ACRD boundaries, but access is difficult and use is limited as a result. Several provincial parks, marine parks and park reserves have also been designated on the west coast – mainly in and around Clayoquot Sound. Many of those have limited development and again access limits use. A full list of provincial parks and park reserves in ACRD is included in Appendix 1.

Pacific Rim National Park is the only federal park in ACRD. It's three phases – Long Beach, the Broken Group and the West Coast Trail – attract visitors from across the country and beyond and make a significant contribution to the regional economy, particularly that of the west coast communities.

HISTORY AND CURRENT ROLE OF EXISTING REGIONAL PARKS

At the present time, ACRD has only two regional parks – Mount Arrowsmith and China Creek. Both are in the Alberni Valley and both were established to cater to specific outdoor pursuits.

Mount Arrowsmith Provincial Park

Mount Arrowsmith is a prominent landmark in central Vancouver Island. It has a long history of recreational use, dating back to the early 1900's when the CPR constructed a trail from Cameron Lake. The mountain became popular with skiers in the 1950's and the Mount Arrowsmith Ski Club was formed in 1959. Construction of a logging road in the 1960's allowed greater recreational access and the ski club subsequently mounted an initiative to develop a major ski area on Cokely Ridge, then owned by MacMillan Bloedel.

It was that initiative which resulted in the establishment of the regional park in 1972 after MacMillan Bloedel was successfully lobbied to donate 607 hectares on Cokely Ridge to Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District. The next 40 years saw a series of attempts to develop downhill skiing in the park - initially by volunteers and latterly by commercial operators - but none proved viable. As of 2008, the ski area has been entirely decommissioned, all buildings and structures removed and residual fuel contamination cleaned up. Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park now functions purely as a passive recreation area used primarily by hikers, climbers, cross-country skiers and snowmobilers.

Although the park is owned by Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, it is located in the Regional District of Nanaimo. RDN are in the process of acquiring crown land on the adjoining massif of Mount Arrowsmith. With the demise of the ski area, ACRD has approached RDN to see whether they have an interest in taking over the regional park on Cokely Ridge and managing it jointly with the massif.

China Creek Regional Park

China Creek Regional Park on the Alberni Inlet, began life as a provincial park, but was transferred to the regional district in the early 1980's. Since then, its primary role has been to provide camping for the recreational sports fishery. The park is under lease to the Port Alberni Port Authority which operates a marina on the adjoining foreshore. As of 2008, a new twenty year lease has just been negotiated which will see a percentage of campground fees returned to the regional district for regional park purposes.

CHANGING TIMES

Historically, ACRD has tended to be reactive rather than proactive in terms of involvement in regional parks. This is in large part because of ease of access to the surrounding Tree Farm Licence which has provided opportunities for a wide range of outdoor activities.

Times are changing, however, and there are many reasons why it is prudent to revisit ACRD's traditional approach to regional parks and trails:

- the recent removal of private lands from the TFL means that access to private forest lands are dependant on individual logging companies and as they change hands, so can their policies. Areas which have traditionally been open to the public may suddenly no longer be so and permitted uses may change;
- the changing economy, especially the downsizing of the forest industry, has led to a renewed interest in creating employment other sectors. In this region, eco-tourism is one of the stronger contenders for economic diversification;
- changing demographics and growth rates are likewise a factor. Increasingly, lifestyle choices are an important feature for companies looking to relocate or for seniors looking for a retirement community;
- it is much more cost effective to identify key areas of open space well ahead of urban growth and increased land values. One has only to look to the east coast of Vancouver Island to see opportunities lost and the high cost of parkland acquisition after growth has occurred. It is particularly important to identify trail corridors in advance of development so that they can be incorporated into design plans;
- there are increasing options for funding assistance from higher levels of government, the private sector and nongovernmental organizations. If we are not positioned to take advantage of these, we will miss out on opportunities and grants will go to other regional districts which are better prepared;
- finally, everyone benefits from a greater degree of certainty whether they be private landowners, developers or the community at large. Traditionally, official community plans focused on developed areas of the community, whereas much recreation of a "regional" nature tends to take place in areas which lie outside OCP boundaries. There is therefore a need for parks and trails planning on a wider, regional basis.

PUBLIC DEMAND FOR REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS

Because of tight time-lines for this report, it was not possible to do a comprehensive review of outdoor recreation needs and priorities. Instead, preliminary discussions were held with planning and recreation staff in all three municipalities, with rural area directors, advisory planning commissions and, in the case of Bamfield, at a community affairs meeting. In most cases, this was the first time the question of regional parks and trails had been raised and discussion tended to be wide ranging, covering past and future issues and including preliminary ideas on sites, trails or outdoor recreation uses; but these suggestions were first-cut, “off the top of the head” responses in many cases and by no means exhaustive. Overall reaction was positive in terms of looking at the concept further, but it was clearly felt by most APC’s that more work would need to be done on specifics.

Official community plans and existing studies and reports with an outdoor recreation component were also reviewed. The available base information varies from one area of the regional district to another. It is clear that in order to move forward, a comprehensive, community wide inventory is required, systematically pulling together existing information and filling in the gaps. (See Overall master Plan Page 13) Put simply, you need to know what public expectations are, what is already being provided by other levels of government, how a regional parks and trails program would fit into that matrix and what its priorities should be. Experience in other regional districts has also shown this to be a crucial first step.

What follows is a summary of initial findings. Because there are differences both in terms of land use and recreational needs in different areas of ACRD, this section of the report looks at issues from the perspective of three geographic areas :

The Alberni Valley : City of Port Alberni; Electoral Areas B (Beaufort), D (Sproat Lake), E (Beaver Creek) and F (Cherry Creek)
Long Beach : Districts of Tofino and Ucluelet; Electoral Area C (Long Beach)
Bamfield : Electoral Area A

The Alberni Valley

The City of Port Alberni is the service centre for the whole Alberni Valley, providing facilities for organized sports and major sporting events. Traditionally, however, valley residents have relied very heavily on the surrounding Tree Farm Licence for a wide range of less structured outdoor activities – camping, fishing, hiking, caving, climbing, cross country skiing, snowmobiling etc. Specific sites within the former TFL and access routes on logging roads are of importance to the community, but in many cases there is no official recognition or protection for their informal “recreational” status. The same lack of formal recognition applies to sites of environmental importance.

Many of these areas (particularly in the upper Alberni and Ash River valleys) are on private lands held by Island Timberlands and TimberWest. With the removal of private lands from the TFL, there is no guarantee of public access in the long-term; additionally, access policies vary from company to company. On private forest lands on the east coast of Vancouver Island public access is much more restrictive than it has traditionally been in the Alberni Valley - so much so, that in some areas the Ministry of Environment is reconsidering its policies on stocking lakes for recreational sports fishing. In the Alberni Valley, Island Timberlands access policy prohibits camping other than in officially designated areas such as Macktush, although this has not been enforced yet. Forest industry representatives are aware of recreation issues and are frequently prepared to work with local governments and community groups, but they prefer to have areas of concern identified well in advance so that they can be taken into account in their own planning.

It is therefore important that areas of recreational or environmental significance should be identified and prioritized with public input. A regional parks function would help do this. Some of the groundwork has already been done. The West Island Woodlands Advisory Committee (WIWAG) has produced a recreational access inventory (Appendix 2) which will help form the basis of an overall recreational inventory for the Alberni Valley.

Within the Alberni Valley, regional trails planning is more advanced than regional parks planning. During 2005-6, two volunteer groups (the Friends of the Log Train Trail and the Alberni Valley Outdoor Club), carried out an extensive trail mapping project in co-operation with ACRD. A recreation consultant was hired to assist in identifying key trail linkages and assess options. The resulting *Alberni Valley Trails Planning Study* concluded that there is untapped economic potential in promoting trails in the area as well as lifestyle and health benefits to residents. It also identified four priority regional trail corridors, of significance both within the Alberni Valley and as connectors to trail systems in the adjoining regional districts of Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo and Comox Strathcona. (See Appendix 3) In 2006, the Ministry of Environment commissioned an access inventory for the Stamp-Somass River System, which highlighted the importance of river corridors along the Stamp, Sproat and Somass Rivers, for conservation and recreational purposes; it identified existing and potential access points for trails and launch sites for drift boats.

In response to surveys, valley residents consistently rate the natural environment as one of the community's most important assets. There is also a strong desire for an improved, non-motorized trail system – both for recreation and for commuting on foot or by bicycle. This demand is consistent both within the city and the rural areas. It is reflected in discussions with APC's, in community and shoreline master plans, was mentioned repeatedly in meetings on the 20/20 Outlook process and highlighted in their vision statement and was identified by the Macauley Review of the Port Alberni Forest Industry as a substantial potential tourism resource. Most recently, the Port Alberni Sustainable Cities report recommended enhancement of the local trail system in the Alberni Valley as having the most potential for an initial demonstration project in sustainability.

It is also recognized, however, that there are issues relating to trails which have to be worked through – specifically conflicts with motorized and non-motorized users, the need to establish standards of maintenance for different types of trails and requirements for accurate signage

Emerging from initial discussions, areas and uses mentioned include, in no particular order:

- Protection of the river corridors (specific sites noted)
- Drift boat launch sites on the Stamp-Somass Rivers
- Public boat launch at Great Central Lake
- Turtle Lake wetlands
- Upper Alberni and Ash River valleys (specific sites to be determined through public input)
- Sproat Lake (need for more waterfront access; need to deal with “informal” camping in TFL)
- Ward Lake
- Wiener Creek
- Devil's Den
- Bluff systems – particularly the Lookout at the entrance to town
- Burde Street ponds

- Mountain biking
- Horseback riding
- Cross-country ski area with direct access from public road (e.g. in the Taylor River flats area)
- RV campsites

As indicated above, however, these suggestions are considered preliminary, particularly as many people may not be aware that areas of traditional use in the TFL are on private land.

Long Beach

Because Long Beach electoral area and the Districts of Tofino and Ucluelet are surrounded by Pacific Rim National Park and provincial parks in Clayoquot Sound, their regional park issues are different in scope from those of the Alberni Valley.

The need for a safe launch site for kayaks is clearly a priority. Because of the logistics of loading and unloading, kayaks take more time to launch and take out than power boats; a situation where they share the same launching ramp is therefore not ideal, because kayaks can cause delays to other boat owners. At present, there are no public launch sites on Ucluelet Inlet. Development of the Willowbrae Road park site as a launch site for kayaks and roof top boats would help remedy this situation. Acquisition of Port Albion dock on the east side of Ucluelet Inlet is also a possibility, but would require additional upland property to be fully useable. The potential for opening up and signing road ends on the waterfront in Millstream was also suggested by APC members.

Other sites of interest include, in no particular order:

Virgin Falls

the lower Maggie River (access to fish ladders and swimming hole)

Cannery Bay on Tofino Inlet

Berryman Point as an important access into Clayoquot Arm

the old cannery site on the west side of Clayoquot Arm

McLean's Mill on Tofino Inlet

the bog in the ox-bow between Kennedy River and Tofino Inlet

surfing sites on Barkley Sound.

The need for more campsites was mentioned several times - specifically at Kennedy Lake and designated kayak campsites in Clayoquot Sound.

Trail development is of interest to Long Beach APC and the municipalities both of whom are developing their own internal trail systems. Of particular interest, is the concept of extending the Wild Pacific Trail from the boundary of the Ucluelet through lands in the regional district, thence northwards through Pacific Rim Park to the Tofino trail system. This would be a multi entrance and exit route, one of the entry points being the Willowbrae Road access in Millstream. This would be a longer term project; bringing it to fruition would involve partnering with Pacific Rim Park and with First Nations to cross the reserve at the south end of the park.

Other existing or potential trail routes mentioned include, in no particular order :

Old telegraph routes around Hesquiaht

Meares Island Big Trees Trail

route from the airport to Tofino Inlet

Telegraph Trail from Toquart to Ucluelet

link from the head of Ucluelet Inlet to Kennedy Lake and Kennedy Flats

As with the Alberni Valley, this is considered as a preliminary list; in particular recreational inventories for the TFL should be reviewed and overall public input sought.

Long Beach Advisory Planning Commission identified development of a passive park and roof-top boat launch at Willowbrae as a first priority and extension of the Wild Pacific trail to the park as a second priority. The Toquart – Ucluelet Telegraph Trail was considered a lower, long-term objective. No other options were prioritised.

Bamfield

In Bamfield, the small size of the community and the fact that there are many absentee land owners, puts a greater burden on volunteers for all aspects of community life; that fact, taken together with a shortage of funds has limited what the community has been able to do in terms of outdoor recreation. This is a situation where funds from a regional parks function, even on a small scale, could be of considerable assistance.

Preliminary discussions indicate an interest in developing trails in the community forest. Many have already been GPS'd and could link in with interpretive walks around large trees and bogs near the South Bamfield Road. The need for links into the federal park was suggested e.g. by extending the old telegraph trail from the end of the West Coast Trail across the Pachena River and into town, and/or reviving the original Cape Beale route into the west side; the latter would involve partnering with First Nations to cross the reserve.

Areas which should be considered for some level of protection include Sarita Falls, and Sarita and Frederick Lakes.

Bamfield shares the same type of issues with respect to kayaks, as Long Beach. Kayakers launching or coming out at the boat launch in Port Desire tend to cause delays. It was suggested that this could be remedied by putting in a separate kayak launch next to the present ramp. Alternatively the federally owned access at the south end of Bamfield Inlet could be developed to service kayakers; this would involve discussions with Parks Canada and should possibly be a federal initiative. A lack of designated camping areas in the Deer Group was also cited as a problem – particularly the lack of toilet facilities, the need for garbage disposal and shortage of firewood.

Parking remains an ongoing problem at the government dock, particularly in summer.

This was again considered to be a preliminary discussion. It is felt that a community mapping would be especially useful in Bamfield to help crystallize ideas. None of the above suggestions were prioritized. The community indicated that they would want to have further discussion on priorities.

HOW TO GET THERE/MEETING THE DEMAND

Documenting community demand for an increased presence in regional parks and trails is one thing, but meeting it is another matter. ACRD has a relatively small population base (30,664 as of the 2006 census) and limited financial resources. What are the options and how can the challenge be met in a fiscally responsible manner?

Be Prepared to Take Advantage of Opportunities as They Arise

There are significant opportunities to apply for funding assistance and work with other agencies, but it is important to have the groundwork in place to take advantage of these. From research with other regional districts and local experience in dealing with volunteer groups in the Alberni Valley over the last several years, it is clear that there are three basic requirements for moving forward, particularly if we hope to build partnerships :

1. Overall Plan /Vision for Regional Parks and Trails
2. Administrative Support
3. Financing - both capital and maintenance

It is recognized that resources are limited but there are various methods by which these three components can be met and they need not be prohibitively expensive.

1. Overall Master Plan or Vision

It is important to have a clear idea of the specific community needs that will be met through a “regional” parks and trails program and to identify sites of particular interest.

There are several reasons why this first step is so important to the overall process :

- it helps set priorities for the Regional Board;
- it is normally a key requirement of outside funding agencies. There are many potential sources of grants, but in almost all cases, potential donors want assurances that a proposed project has been thought through and is part of an overall planning process;
- private land owners, particularly forest companies, frequently express a wish for greater certainty; it assists in their planning and if they are able to meet a community objective, it minimizes last minute confrontations when logging plans are announced.

There should ideally be four steps to a parks and trails planning process :

i) Identify all existing parks and open space at whatever governmental level (i.e. community/municipal, regional, provincial (both parks, and designated trails & campsites operated by the Ministry of Tourism) and national and the outdoor recreation needs or environmental stewardship goals which they meet.

It is important to be comprehensive, because a regional system should be complementary to parks and trails operated by other levels of government.

ii) Systematically identify “missing pieces”, including :

- specific locations and trail corridors which are currently being used for outdoor recreation, but which do not have any type of formal park or recreational status;
- specific locations which are of environmental importance but are not currently protected;
- key access routes to these locations, especially if this involves access across private lands. This, for example would be an issue with many locations in the former TFL which are accessed by logging road;
- specific types of outdoor recreation uses which are not currently being met.

iii) Prioritize key sites, corridors and uses and decide which of those would best be met by a regional parks system.

iv) Determine how best to acquire or protect these areas. In particular, look at partnership opportunities (See Page 16 below) In some jurisdictions there is a distinction between “active” and “non-active” parkland or park reserves, with different standards for each. This enables a regional district to acquire land as it becomes available, but to defer developing it.

Much of this basic inventory has already been done by different organizations in the community but it is somewhat piecemeal and should be completed comprehensively. In particular, there needs to be a process for public input. This should include open houses where the public is invited to come and map areas of importance to them. It should also include a statistically valid survey to determine the types of outdoor recreation the community is involved in, sites of interest and degree of support for a range of funding levels.

2. Administrative Support or Delivery Vehicle

Experience in the Alberni Valley with volunteers in trail construction over the last several years indicates that while it is possible to tap into funding sources, a formally established administrative “vehicle” is essential to a successful project. This is confirmed by experience in other regional districts and from comments from major land owners and other government agencies who find it easier to deal with a clearly established point of contact. Among other duties, the person or agency in an administrative role:

- takes the lead in researching and applying for grants. (Almost all grants have different criteria and also different reporting mechanisms if they are approved.);
- deals with the logistics of recruiting and managing the work crew, whether volunteer or hired;
- deals with landowners in negotiating trail use agreements, where required;
- acts as the point of contact with other agencies.

That administrative role is time-consuming and starting to be beyond the capacity of volunteers. Among other regional districts, levels of administration vary widely from a full-time complement of parks staff – both management and work crews - to extensive use of volunteers and/or parks & trails societies. In Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, it is recognized that workloads are such that there is limited capacity to take on a higher management role in parks and trails without additional staff; a further limitation is the fact that the regional district has no outside staff.

There are therefore two options :

- i) The regional district assumes primary responsibility for administration and hires a parks and trails coordinator. It is anticipated that this would be on a part-time basis, at least initially, but this would depend on the extent to which the regional district wishes to become involved in the regional parks function. Outside work would be done on a contract basis or by volunteers or a combination of both
- ii) Consider the establishment of a Trails Society to take on that administrative role for trails with the regional district committing some funding on an annual basis.

It is suggested that a model similar to that successfully employed by the Kootenay-Columbia Regional District could work here. The Kootenay Columbia Trails Society was formed in 1996; it receives funding from the regional district on an annual basis to employ a coordinator who works part time during the winter (one day per week) and full time in the summer supervising work crews. Regional district funding assists with the coordinator’s salary and, most crucially, covers off insurance costs for the society – both for work crews and for landowner liability. The cost of insurance is becoming almost prohibitive for small-scale volunteer organizations and is an essential issue which has to be addressed if a non-profit society is going to take the administrative lead.

It should be noted that option (i) would most likely be preferred by other agencies and major landowners, who prefer to deal with local government and the long-term certainty associated with it; however, they would not necessarily be averse to dealing with a trails society.

3. Financing

Capital Fund

There are many ways of acquiring land for parks and trails; outright purchase is only one of them and large capital outlays are not necessarily always required. These are outlined in more detail on page 16 below.

It is, however, extremely important to have some capital funding available so as to be able to take advantage of opportunities as they arise – whether it be a chance to purchase a piece of property which has been identified as high priority for the parks system and comes on the market, or to provide matching funds for grant applications for construction projects. Almost all grants have two requirements: proof that a given project is part of an overall plan and other funding sources. It is rare to have a grant fund a project in its entirety.

The balance of funds left over from the remediation of Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park provides an ideal basis for a capital parks and trails fund. This money can only be used in officially designated regional parks and trails. As things presently stand, therefore, it can only be spent in either Mount Arrowsmith or China Creek regional parks. For it to be used elsewhere, the Regional Board would have to formally designate particular site(s) or trail(s) as “regional”.

If a capital fund is established, provision should be made to replenish it over time as it becomes depleted.

Maintenance Costs

While there are a number of grants available for capital projects, there are fewer options to obtain outside funding for ongoing maintenance. It is therefore also necessary to have a budget component to cover this. Again, costs will obviously depend on the extent to which the regional district opts to become involved in the function and on the standards to which parks and trails are maintained. Another key factor where costs are concerned, is the number of structures (e.g. bridges) involved. Discussions with other areas indicate that maintenance costs, particularly for items like back country trails with few bridges, are likely to be low on an annual basis. Ongoing maintenance is often an easy contribution for a volunteer group to make. The Alberni Valley Outdoor Club, for example, has been doing maintenance on trails for many years and has undertaken to do the same for the new CNPR Alberni Inlet Trail.

The cost of a regional parks and trails function will depend on the extent to which ACRD wishes to become involved and how it is administered. It is suggested that that decision should be made after more extensive community input, both on what the public’s priorities are for outdoor recreation, and an indication, on a sliding scale, of what they would be prepared to contribute annually. (e.g. \$0; \$0 - \$10; \$11 - \$20; \$21 - \$30; \$30 - \$40) For example, if \$50,000 were to be taxed annually that would translate to \$8.60 per \$100,000 of assessed value, based on figures for 2008. Alternatively, a parcel tax could be looked at. That would be a reasonable starting point and would help get smaller projects off the ground.

Other sources of revenue from within the region could include revenues from the lease of China Creek Provincial Park; possibly a share of revenues from the community forests could also be considered.

Outside Sources of Funding, Other Options for Land Acquisition and Trail Use Agreements

Grant Applications

There are a number of sources of grant monies – each with its own criteria. See for example (insert website). Both the Stamp River and Alberni Inlet trail projects have been successful in bringing substantial funds into the community in this way.

Partnerships

Many agencies – governmental, First Nations, NGO's and private landowners - are also facing similar requests from the public to protect outdoor recreation opportunities or to preserve environmentally sensitive sites. There is frequently interest in forming working partnerships to achieve common ends; many successful regional parks and trails initiatives on the east coast of Vancouver Island have been completed in this way. Nanaimo Regional District, for example, frequently makes major parkland acquisitions in partnership with non-governmental organizations and has a history of establishing trail corridors without outright purchase.

In ACRD, some partnership opportunities should fall out of the planning process described above. The following are some suggestions for potential partners. Not all will be applicable in every situation but they represent a toolbox of options:

Member Municipalities

Pooling resources and working together on joint projects with the municipalities of Port Alberni, Tofino and Ucluelet is an option particularly on items like connections between regional and municipal trail systems, or if an area like the Burde Street ponds on the boundary of Port Alberni were to be acquired.

Community Forests

There is potential for increased outdoor recreation in conjunction with the community forests in Bamfield, Ucluelet and the Alberni Valley.

Provincial Government Agencies and Crown Corporations

There are various opportunities for working with the province. These include :

- regional park designations or trail corridors on crown land
- assistance with permitting processes on crown land
- joint project funding (Recent examples include the Stamp River Trail, Greenmax Trail and Fossli Park access)
- establishment of trails on road allowances or utility rights-way
- potential partnerships in securing access through private forest lands to fishing lakes and forest recreation sites and trails

Key crown agencies to work with include the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & the Arts and the Ministry of Environment (BC Parks and Fisheries branches)

First Nations

First Nations are assuming management roles in provincial recreation sites and have recently signed a co-management agreement with the province for Stamp Falls Provincial Park. The Alberni Valley Outdoor Club has also assisted in trail construction through part of the Hupacasath woodlot on Roger Creek – a project which benefits the whole community.

Private Landowners

Partnerships with forest companies are particularly relevant to this regional district. Access to forest lands has traditionally been the cornerstone of outdoor recreation throughout the region. Issues of mutual interest include:

- protection or acquisition of sites of recreational or environmental importance;
- protection of access roads for recreational purposes, particularly after logging has finished;
- use agreements for trail corridors.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's)

Frequently, NGO's have similar interests to regional districts particularly where environmental stewardship is concerned. Ducks Unlimited and the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program purchased 100 hectares in the Somass Estuary in 2001. The Pacific Salmon Foundation has a history of supporting fisheries conservation projects throughout the ACRD. The Land Conservancy and The Nature Trust have also shown an interest in this regional district. These are examples of NGO's which could be natural partners in an enhanced parks function both in land acquisition or in holding conservation covenants.

The Island Corridor Foundation would be a logical partner where it is possible to have bike paths or trail routes within the railway right-of-way.

On the west coast, the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust is another potential partner.

Local Community Groups and Outdoor Recreation Groups

There is already a strong spirit of volunteerism throughout the regional district, with many groups ready and willing to assist with specific projects, but they also need some support.

Neighbouring Regional Districts

Partnerships with neighbouring regional districts may be an option in some cases – for example in connecting regional trail corridors or if a key piece of property happens to straddle a boundary. Nanaimo Regional District has already expressed an interest in a Horne Lake Trail link into the Alberni Valley. In the long-term, the potential also exists for trail connections through to Cowichan Valley Regional District and Comox Valley Regional District

Conservation Covenants

Conservation covenants are an option where purchase may not be appropriate or desired, but a landowner is willing to take steps to protect the natural environment. If a covenant is agreed to, it could be held by either the regional district or a conservation organization such as The Nature Trust or The Land Conservancy. There is already one example of this on Lugin Creek in the City of Port Alberni.

Acquisition of Land Through the Development Process

The Local Government Act provides a legislative basis for parkland acquisition through the development process in the following cases :

- the requirement for community parkland dedication or cash in lieu as part of the subdivision process (Section 941)
- where parkland is dedicated as a consequence of subdivision of crown land outside a municipal boundary, the regional district is entitled to possession and use of the land for park purposes (Section 303)
- development cost charges may be imposed for providing and improving parkland to service, *directly or indirectly*, the development for which the charge is being imposed. (Section 933)

Public Donations

Consider setting up an endowment fund. It has been the experience of the Friends of the Log Train Trail that many people are interested in contributing to a specific project in which they have an interest. The regional district also has the advantage of being able to provide tax receipts which encourages donations.

NEXT STEPS

From preliminary discussions with regional district directors and advisory planning commissions, it is clear that there is interest in looking further at an increased role in regional parks and trails. There is recognition of the importance of outdoor recreation for residents of the region, for visitors and as a component of economic diversification. At the same time, however, there is widespread awareness that there are many issues to be considered, that the regional district has limited resources and care must be taken not to take on more than can be managed. The message might best be characterized as, “Move forward, but with caution.”

RECOMMENDATIONS :

1. ONGOING :

1.1 Continue with initiatives on existing regional parks :

Mount Arrowsmith

The entire summit of the mountain remains one of the most popular outdoor recreation sites in the Alberni Valley attracting visitors from throughout Vancouver Island and beyond and its recreational role should be maintained as a high priority. It makes sense, however, to manage the regional park with the adjoining massif. Given that it is inside Nanaimo Regional District, the approach to RDN to take over management is a logical one.

China Creek

China Creek’s longstanding role as both a passive beach recreation area and a base for the sports fishery is not anticipated to change. Obtaining a percentage of revenues from the Port Authority is a positive step.

2. MOVING FORWARD - LONGTERM

It is suggested that the region consider a “multi-pronged” approach to moving forward:

2.1 Fill in the big picture - complete an overall plan/vision for regional parks and trails

It is important to move forward and make decisions with the best inventory and knowledge base possible. Some of base information is already available, but there are gaps. It would be particularly useful to have public participation in a mapping exercise. In the Alberni Valley, this could readily be done as part of the “visioning” process already planned in preparation for upcoming official community plan reviews. In the case of Long Beach and Bamfield, it is suggested that an afternoon or evening workshop could be held in each community.

This process should :

- identify all existing parks and trails at various governmental levels;
- identify areas and corridors of importance for outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship;
- identify sites of interest which are not currently in parkland;
- identify outdoor recreation activities which are not presently being met;
- identify key access roads within the TFL
- establish which areas and uses should be considered for inclusion in a regional parks and trails function.
- include provision for public input through surveys and workshops to help determine the community's outdoor recreation needs and, from a range of possible costs, what they would be prepared to pay for a regional parks and trails service. (A variety of sample questionnaires is available.)

2.2 From the planning process, establish long-term, prioritized objectives

This should:

- determine which areas and trail corridors should be come under a “regional” designation;
- establish their relative importance on a scale of high, medium and low;
- set out standards & levels of maintenance (e.g. for parks, passive or active; for trails, level of difficulty);
- identify potential partners and most appropriate method(s) of implementation for each.

2.3 Establish the “delivery vehicle”

Determine whether administration will be the responsibility of the regional district or whether it should be shared with a non-profit group, such as a trails society, with financial support from the regional district.

This will depend partly on the outcome of the planning process and the extent to which the regional district wishes to become involved in the function.

2.4 Put in place the financing

It is recommended that surplus funds from Mount Arrowsmith Regional Park be used as capital fund to enable the regional district to provide leveraging funds for land acquisition, grant applications for construction and signage or similar projects. An annual amount should also be budgeted for maintenance and administrative costs, the amount to be finalized after the planning process is complete.

3. MOVING FORWARD - SHORTTERM

In the short term, undertake small-scale projects in each of the three sub-regions on a trial basis

While long-term objectives will fall out of the planning process, there are two small-scale initiatives - one in the Alberni Valley and one in Long Beach - which have emerged as early priorities. It is suggested that these should be viewed as “trial runs” while inventories are completed and longer term options considered.

Alberni Valley

In the Alberni Valley, trails have emerged as a priority and work has already been done to identify regional corridors. One of those is the CNPR Alberni Inlet Trail. The regional district is one of the proponents of this project and funding has been obtained from several sources including the Island Coastal Economic Trust and the provincial Community Tourism Program. The trail runs partly on crown land and partly on private land owned by Island Timberlands. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is processing permitting for the crown land portion and Island Timberlands has indicated a willingness to enter into a use agreement with the regional district for their section. It is suggested that ACRD move forward with the use agreement. This is a small first step - one which would not be costly (Nanaimo's use agreements are in the order of \$500 per five year term) but which would provide an opportunity to develop a use agreement on a trial basis. Because this is intended as a walking trail, it will not have the problems associated with motorized use; for this reason it is also a good one to start with.

3.1 It is recommended that the CNPR Inlet Trail be designated as a “regional trail” and that negotiations be started on a trail use agreement.

Long Beach

The one clear priority which emerged in Long Beach was the need for improved access to Ucluelet Inlet. This is supported by the recently adopted South Long Beach Community Plan and the regional district already owns the proposed site on Willowbrae Road. Development of a passive park with a picnic area and launch for car-top boats and kayaks would not represent a major expense and would require little upkeep. This is also a small-scale project but one which is a good fit for a regional park in that it would benefit both local residents and visitors.

3.2 It is recommended that the Willowbrae park site be designated as a “regional park” and developed for a picnic area and car-top boat launch.

Bamfield

A similar small-scale project should also be considered in Bamfield, but a recommendation on that should come from the community.