



Regional Board Report

Information

To: Regional Board
From: Manager, Parks Services
Date: February 2, 2023
Subject: 2022 Regional Parks Visitor Services Program Update

Voting Entitlement: *All Directors – Unweighted Corporate Vote – Simple Majority – (LGA s.208)*

Purpose: To provide the Board with a summary and update on the programs, events, and volunteer initiatives offered by Visitor Services in Regional Parks in 2022.

Executive Summary:

The Visitor Services division of the Regional Parks Service Program seeks to engage the public to encourage passive recreation, connection to nature, and education about our natural environment in Regional Parks. Specific programming, events, and volunteer opportunities are developed to reach these objectives.

In 2022, 36,068 people took part in an interpretive program or event in a Regional Park, and volunteers logged over 1,000 hours toward park improvement projects and initiatives. The 2022 program and events numbers reflect a continuing upward trend from pandemic years 2020 (19,500 participants) and 2021 (27,633 participants) and are well on the way to returning to pre-pandemic levels of 43,000 participants annually.

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Regional Board receive the 2022 Regional Parks Visitor Services Program Update as attached to the report from the Manager, Parks Services dated February 2, 2023 for information.

Respectfully submitted by: Isabella Hodson, Supervisor – Community Relations & Visitor Services

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Wayne Darlington", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Wayne Darlington, Manager – Parks Planning, Capital Projects & Visitor Services

Attachment(s): 1. 2022 Parks Visitor Services - By the Numbers Booklet
2. 2022 Regional Parks Visitor Services Program Update - PowerPoint Presentation

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Priorities: Environment, Sustainable Communities

Values: Collaboration, Relationships

Background:

The Visitor Services component of Parks Services has operated for 28 years and is staged from the Environmental Education Centre for the Okanagan (EECO). Visitor Services programming in the community is inclusive of all ages and abilities and provides opportunities for the public to get into parks and learn about the importance of nature in our shared landscape.

From January 2nd to December 31st, 2022, Parks Visitor Services programs, events, EECO visitation, and volunteering attracted a total of 36,068 participants. While this number continues to reflect a decline from pre-pandemic public program participation (43,000 in 2019), it's a notable year-over-year increase from the 27,633 participants of 2021 and the 19,500 participants of 2020. Areas of growth include environmental education field trips, which showed a threefold increase in bookings, events, EECO visitation, recurring programs (multi-week registered programs), and outreach.

Following public health measures and the dropping of mandates, in-person programs returned to pre-pandemic capacity in 2022, with a wide variety of guided hikes, roving, and pop-up programs offered throughout the regional parks system. 2022 also saw the continuation of Indigenous-led programs and partnerships with community groups and organizations that enabled RDCO Parks Services to reach more diverse audiences, including the LGBTQ2+ community and seniors in care homes. These programs, through the summer months, were supported by full-time summer students, who were able to gain valuable employment training and experience.

2022 saw a significant increase in school field trip bookings, with 472 programs booked and 11,794 participants compared to 136 programs booked in 2021 with 5,211 children taking part in programming about salmon, owls, bears, birds, and more. Pre-pandemic environmental education programming reached audiences of 8,700 – 9,900 annually, so 2022 reflects a solid growth of this program and showcases the importance of RDCO parks programming for Central Okanagan teachers and school districts.

Events in Regional Parks were affected by COVID-19 protocols before the dropping of mandates, primarily due to group size limitations, but quickly returned to normal in spring 2022. Highlights of RDCO Parks event programs include Family Day Fiesta, Canada's Parks Day, Welcome the Kokanee, the Kikinee Festival, and the ever-popular Spooktacular pumpkin walk. As with programs, events are spread out throughout the regional parks system to include a representative spread across the region.

The EECO continued to function as a central hub for the community showcasing the region's beautiful regional parks system to inspire residents and visitors to explore all our 30 regional parks. The EECO remained open six days a week throughout 2022, with the busiest months being May and the return to school months of September and October.

The 2022 Volunteer in Parks (VIP) program, which includes several Friends of Parks groups, continued to provide opportunities for residents to engage in our regional parks. Stewardship activities continued to be a priority as they allow volunteers to get outside and complete important projects. Friends of

Parks program highlights for 2022 include: trail maintenance by the Friends of Black Mountain; \$20,000 raised by the Gellatly Nut Farm Society through the harvest and sale of nuts; forest fire fuel mitigation projects by both the Friends of Woodhaven and the Friends of Kalamo; and the grand opening of Phase 3A of Mission Creek Greenway, for which the Friends of Mission Creek contributed \$277,400. VIP Programs of note include the winter dog pilot program in Kopje and Kaloya Regional Parks in Lake Country, now in its second year, and recruitment of volunteers to maintain the Scotty Creek Ice Rink in Electoral Area East.

In total, from January through December, 36,068 park users were engaged in a park program, event, or EECO centre visit in Regional Parks, and volunteers logged over 1,000 hours toward stewardship projects, board meetings, and park improvement initiatives. We will continue offering both staff-led programs and self-guided opportunities for connecting with the natural world and will continue adapting to change and inspiring residents and visitors alike to explore the beauty, wonder, and year-round recreation opportunities of our glorious regional park system. In the attached report, a summary of Visitor Services events, programming, and volunteer accomplishments is provided and covers the period from January through December 2022.

Considerations:

Organizational/External:

Parks Services staff are continually seeking out partnerships to assist with the delivery of Visitor Services programming in an efficient and respectful manner which assists to engage not only residents but our local, provincial, indigenous, and non-profit partners.

Financial:

There are no further financial implications. The delivery of the Visitor Services portion of Regional Parks is accounted for within the RDCO 5 Year Financial Plans approved by the Regional Board each spring.

Legal/Statutory Authority:

The delivery of the Regional Parks service and associated programming and services follows the Letters Patent for the Regional District.

Considerations not applicable:

- Policy
- Organizational
- Alternate Recommendation

Approved for Agenda



Brian Reardon, CAO