

# Regional Parks Service Review



September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

Parks Services  
1450 KLO Road, Kelowna, BC, V1Z 3Z4  
250-469-6232 | parks@rdco.com  
**rdco.com**





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the Regional Board's January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 resolution regarding the "RDCO Service Establishment Bylaw Review Schedule", RDCO Parks staff were directed by the Board to undertake service reviews in 2014 and again in 2019 of the RDCO's regional parks service program.

The purpose of the 2019 Regional Parks Service Review (RPSR) is to support the Regional District's efforts to ensure the cost-effectiveness of services (e.g., services are not costing more than they should) and general process efficiencies. By taking a closer look at the regional park service delivery system, the 2019 RPSR will assist the Park Department and the RDCO to identify and obtain a set of achievable recommendations directed at delivering maximum service efficiency savings in the shortest period of time.

The key steps to assess service efficiency as part of the RPSR included:

- Identifying and assessing costs and cost drivers of current practices;
- Reviewing and assessing services, activities and methods;
- Analysing and comparing service benchmarks and measures, and
- Assessing against other relevant information.

The specific goals for the RPSR included:

- Identify and make recommendation on the range of options for alternative service delivery models, including their pros, cons, and implications.
- Identify any service efficiency gains that could result from implementing alternative models.
- Provide advice on the most effective delivery and planning model to determine the best balance of regional parks services offered.

The scope of the study focused on four major areas of service delivery which included:

1. Parks Services Administration (PSA)
2. Community Relations & Visitor Services (CRVS)
3. Planning & Capital Development (PCD), and
4. Parks & Resource Operations (PRO)

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The following is a summary of the key findings and recommendations emerging from the RPSR. These observations, considerations and recommendations are cognizant of the efforts and commitment of Regional Parks Services staff related to the delivery of efficient and effective operations and particularly recognizes the tremendous pride that RDCO Parks Department staff have in what they deliver and how they serve residents of the Central Okanagan.

Two (2) strategic service level recommendations are provided for the consideration of the RDCO Board of Directors and ten (10) operational / administrative recommendations are identified for the consideration and support of the RDCO Chief Administrative office (CAO).

### **RDCO Board Strategic Service Level Recommendations:**

**RDCO BOARD RECOMMENDATION 1 (Parks Services Administration)** – The RDCO Board should consider bringing a conclusion to it's the annual funding support of \$39,000 provided to the Friends of Fintry Provincial Park. The RDCO entered into a partnership with the Province of BC in 1995 that supported the acquisition of properties that now form Fintry Provincial Park. The RDCO's 20-year debt servicing associated with its purchase of a portion of what is now Fintry Provincial Park concluded in 2016. In 2004 the RDCO Board supported the allocation of \$30,000 in annual funding in support of the Friends of Fintry employing a full time executive director to ensure the Society could achieve the full potential of the Provincial Park site. The initial \$30,000 of financial support increased to \$35,000 in 2005, \$37,000 in 2006 and then again to \$39,000 in 2008 where it has remained for the past 11 years. After making a significant financial contribution to support the acquisition of Fintry Provincial Park and then subsequently investing over \$500,000 over a 15-year period supporting the Friends of Fintry Provincial Park, the RDCO's Regional Parks service program should refocus these funds in support of any of the above RPSR recommendations.

**RDCO BOARD RECOMMENDATION 2 (Planning & Capital Development)** - The RDCO Board should direct staff to develop an updated Regional Parkland Acquisition Strategy in 2020. Parkland acquisition is especially important in the Central Okanagan where rapid growth and high land costs have become the norm over the past 20 years. In the face of these challenges, expansion of the regional parks system is critical for the protection of the region's sensitive ecosystems, and for meeting the nature based outdoor recreation needs of the region's increasing population. The updated RDCO Regional Parkland Acquisition Strategy should consider candidate properties for each type of park in the Official Regional Parks Plan classification system as well as identify funding requirements and funding sources to implement the Strategy.

## **Chief Administrative Office (CAO) Service Program Operational / Administrative Recommendations**

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 1 (Parks Services Administration)** – The Regional Parks Service program should continue to both update and establish department administrative policies that support contemporary operations of the department in context with the RDCO’s current Corporate policy framework. In addition, the Parks Services Department should continue to develop and request RDCO Board consideration for the adoption of new policies that support clear operating approaches to risk management in regional parks as well as providing clarity for desired operational service delivery levels in regional parks.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 2 (Community Relations & Visitor Services)** – Improved coordination of numerous opportunities for partnerships with private sector and community groups could lead to service efficiency gains (for new initiatives) in the regional parks system. The Regional Parks Service program should consider facilitating the establishment of “targeted” partnerships with organizations that have a primary role aimed at fund raising to assist / offset future regional park system operating and capital development costs. Specifically support from partner organizations should be associated with the operation and installation of important park infrastructure in many regional parks and could include RDCO sponsored “partnership incentive” grants to support and leverage additional funds from outside sources. The range in timing herein represents the acknowledgement that it may take up to 5 years to see any effects of facilitating greater regional park partnership support.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 3 (Planning & Capital Development)** - The Regional Parks Service program should work with syilx / Okanagan First Nations peoples, Okanagan National Alliance, the Westbank First Nation and Okanagan Indian Band to identify, create, and deliver appropriate and actionable staff training on indigenous issues and reconciliation. In addition, Parks Services Department staff should continue to work on the RDCO’s precedent-setting intergovernmental approach to the Protection and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in Regional Parks.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 4 (Planning & Capital Development)** – Development of a comprehensive database of qualitative and quantitative information on regional park use and user satisfaction. RDCO Parks Services should continue to invest resources into accessing current research methodologies and processes in order to develop a more comprehensive data base of both quantitative and qualitative information concerning the regional parks service program.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 5 (Planning & Capital Development)** – The Regional Parks Service program should continue with its long standing and budgeted interest to acquire and implement the necessary IT systems and programs which will facilitate the application, monitoring, and evaluation of performance and efficiencies of achieving parks maintenance standards (as well as other areas of performance). This will improve efficiency, effectiveness, planning, transparency and accountability. The Parks Services Department needs asset management/mapping and work order tools to keep track of its assets, develop maintenance and state of good repair plans and to assign and measure work performance. That which is measured improves and Parks Services Department is currently without any IT systems for this: it needs such a system to improve service, efficiency, responsiveness to the RDCO Board and customers.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 6 (Planning & Capital Development)** - Develop and document a Comprehensive Report on the Status of Current Regional Parks Infrastructure in 2020. The development of a comprehensive report on the status of the current regional park infrastructure including “linear” assets such as infrastructure associated with trails (trailhead kiosks, signs, bridges, steps, boardwalks, viewing platforms, etc.) will support the subsequent preparation of an updated Official Regional Parks Plan and it will also prepare a valuable tool for the Department to use immediately to inform decision making and the assessment of options and alternatives associated with all aspects of the provision, management and operation of the regional parks system.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 7 (Planning & Capital Development)** - Development of an updated Official Regional Parks Plan (ORPP). Once the development of a comprehensive report on the status of current status of the current regional park infrastructure has been completed, the Parks Services Department should focus attention on the preparation of an ORPP.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 8 (Planning & Capital Development)** – The RDCO’s regional parks exist to help protect and preserve, for current and future generations, the ecosystems, landscapes and natural assets of the region. Within the context of natural area protection, the regional parks system also exists to provide a range of passive outdoor recreation opportunities for the people who live in, and who visit, Central Okanagan. In concert with the completion of an updated ORPP, the RDCO Board should direct staff to create a ten-year regional parkland development capital plan that identifies the improvements that are required in each park. Using the ORPP, the parkland development capital plan should identify, for each category of regional parkland, the level and type of development that may occur, and the level and type of development (including specific facilities and works) that may NOT occur. A ten-year regional parkland development capital plan should encourage financial and operational resource focused partnerships with various “Friends of Regional Parks” groups and should identify the projected taxpayer-supported cost of development in the ten-year plan, as well as the distribution of planned regional parkland capital development expenditures within the region.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 9 (Parks & Resource Operations)** – Over the past 5 years' costs associated with maintenance contracts for turf maintenance and snow clearing have increased primarily due to high labour and operating costs for contactors. Contractor quality control supervision has also been placing higher resource demands on the Parks & Resource Operations (PRO) division. Parks Services Department senior staff should identify a series of regional parks that could be evaluated to identify total cost to complete the work using RDCO term employees and leased equipment. This could be completed as a pilot for select locations for a three-year period to more accurately assess and compare costs and standards prior to consideration of a larger change in approach.

**CAO RECOMMENDATION 10 (Parks & Resource Operations)** – Cleaning of public washrooms (in regional parks) is a workload driver that could be contracted out. RDCO Parks Services staff should examine the feasibility of entering into 3 year contracts at select urban and near urban regional park locations for less cost than the current service delivery model. This could be completed as a pilot for select urban & near urban regional park locations for a three-year period to more accurately assess and compare costs and standards prior to wider roll out.

## 1. Service Review Scope

In accordance with the Regional Board's January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 resolution regarding the "RDCO Service Establishment Bylaw Review Schedule", RDCO Parks staff were directed by the Board to undertake service reviews in 2014 and now again in 2019 of the RDCO's regional parks service program.

## 2. Regional Parks Service Program Overview

### 2.1 Origins - the Regional Parks Service Program in the Central Okanagan

#### **Regional Parks Statutory Letters Patent issued October 25th, 1974**

The Regional District of Central Okanagan operates and maintains a substantial number of regional parks, both on and off the shores of Okanagan Lake and within many of the electoral areas and municipalities. In 1974 the province issued SLP #26 that established the authority to provide a Regional Parks Service. When this function was first assumed and the Letters Patent were issued, the Provincial Government under the provisions of the Regional Parks Act provided funding for the acquisition of properties to the extent of 60 percent (60%) of the cost. This funding program is no longer in place; therefore, the Regional District and participating member municipalities share in the total cost of acquisition and operation.

#### **Regional Parks Extended Service Bylaw No. 410**

In 1990 the RDCO Board and Province approved converting the RDCO's Statutory Letters Patent into a bylaw and at that time, the Regional Parks Act outlined a maximum requisition for this program of \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed value (the 2014 requisition was \$0.1893/\$1000). The first property that was purchased for a regional park is known today as Kaloya Regional Park located on the south shore of Kalamalka Lake. Since inception of the regional parks function, governance of the service program has been tasked to a Parks Advisory Committee (until 2008) and the RDCO Board of Directors. Mr. William (Bill) Eaton was the first Regional Parks Superintendent, whose position was later filled by George Fenton, Bill Vos and since 2008, Murray Kopp. Many properties of diverse nature and topography have been acquired over the years through various means such as leases, acquisition, cost-sharing with the provincial government, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Nature Trust, sharing arrangements with Central Okanagan Parks and Wildlife Trust, Provincial Crown and municipalities. There have also been properties donated and bequeathed by dedicated community citizens to the Regional District for regional park purposes.



## 2.2 RDCO Strategic Plans

Since 2011, the RCDO Parks Services department has undertaken an annual review and update of its strategic direction to ensure that the regional parks service program was in keeping with the Regional District of Central Okanagan Strategic plans which have included the following two plans over the 2015 – 2019 service review period:

- RDCO 2015 – 2018 Strategic Priorities Plan (Adopted February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016)

### **RDCO 2015 – 2018 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES PLAN VISION:**

To be an acknowledged leader in providing good governance and efficient and cost-effective services valued by our municipal and electoral area citizens.

**Strategic Priority 1 - Provide Proactive and Responsive Governance**

**Strategic Priority 2 - Ensure Asset, Service and Financial Sustainability**

**Strategic Priority 3 - Nurture Responsible Growth and Development**

**Strategic Priority 4 - Protect and Promote Our Environment and Lifestyle**

**Strategic Priority 5 - Champion Communications and Engagement**

**Strategic Priority 6 - Empower our Employees**

- Regional Board Strategic Priorities 2019 – 2022 (Adopted July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

## **REGIONAL BOARD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2019 – 2022 VISION:**

The RDCO is a vibrant and resilient region, characterized by interconnected urban centres, robust rural communities and a stunning natural environment. Member municipalities and Electoral Areas work together in a spirit of respect and collaboration, to address shared needs and pursue joint opportunities.

The syilx/Okanagan people are true partners, helping to interpret the past, shape the present and define a common future.

Citizens across the region are engaged in governance and invested in efforts taken to strengthen the broader community.

### **2019 Strategic Priorities at a Glance**

RDCO's strategic priorities, developed by the Regional Board, speak to important goals, services and needs on which the Board wishes to focus the organization's attention and resources.

#### **Transportation and Mobility**

We will promote transportation and land use approaches that enhance movement throughout the region and reduce our collective reliance on vehicles.

#### **Sustainable Communities**

We will initiate and support efforts to create a healthy built environment in which all people throughout the region enjoy a high quality of life with access to safe neighbourhoods including a diverse range of housing options

#### **Economic Development**

We will support economic development through the efforts of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission, municipalities, syilx/ Okanagan people and others aimed at building the regional economy.

#### **Environment**

We will initiate and support efforts to reduce our environmental footprint, adapt to climate change and connect with nature.

## 2.3 The Regional Parks Service Program – Delivering on the RDCO’s Strategic Priorities

In concert with the RDCO Corporate Strategic Planning process, Parks Services staff annually submit a regional parks service program update in concert with the annual five-year financial plan bylaw consideration. Over the period of the 2014 – 2019 the Regional Parks Service program has consistently advised of the regional parks service program position and provided the RDCO Board of Directors with recommendations on the direction that the Regional Parks service program should take over the five years. Staff recommendations have been based on several core values:

- 1) Regional Parks are inherently worth preserving because of their environmental value;
- 2) Regional Parks contribute to the overall well-being of the Central Okanagan community;
- 3) Regional Parks services and amenities must create opportunities for everyone to experience, learn about, and enjoy parks.

Staff developed Vision and Mission Statements for the Parks Services Department that reflect these core values and also reflect the significance of the RDCO Corporate Mission Statements.

***RDCO Parks Services will provide a legacy of parks & community recreation amenities while conserving the unique ecological and cultural values of the Okanagan Region.***

**The basic tenet of the RDCO Regional Parks service delivery philosophy is that the delivery of Parks Services should be equitably focused on the indirect benefits all residents of the community gain from our services as well as the direct benefits gained by individuals. The ultimate objective is to make the most effective use of limited available resources by providing services in a rational, consistent, equitable manner that can be clearly understood and enjoyed by all local residents.**

**Although there are many benefits to be gained for individual citizens in our community who access our programs, we believe that the delivery of RDCO Parks Services should be equitably focused on both the indirect benefits of our services which accrue to all residents of our community as well as the receipt of direct program benefits for individuals. We also believe that RDCO Parks Services should take a community wide leadership role in helping to define our special syilx and Okanagan sense of place.**

We believe that people develop a sense of place through experience and knowledge of a particular area. A sense of place emerges through knowledge of the history, geography and geology of an area, its flora and fauna, the legends of a place, and a growing sense of the land and its history after living there for a time.

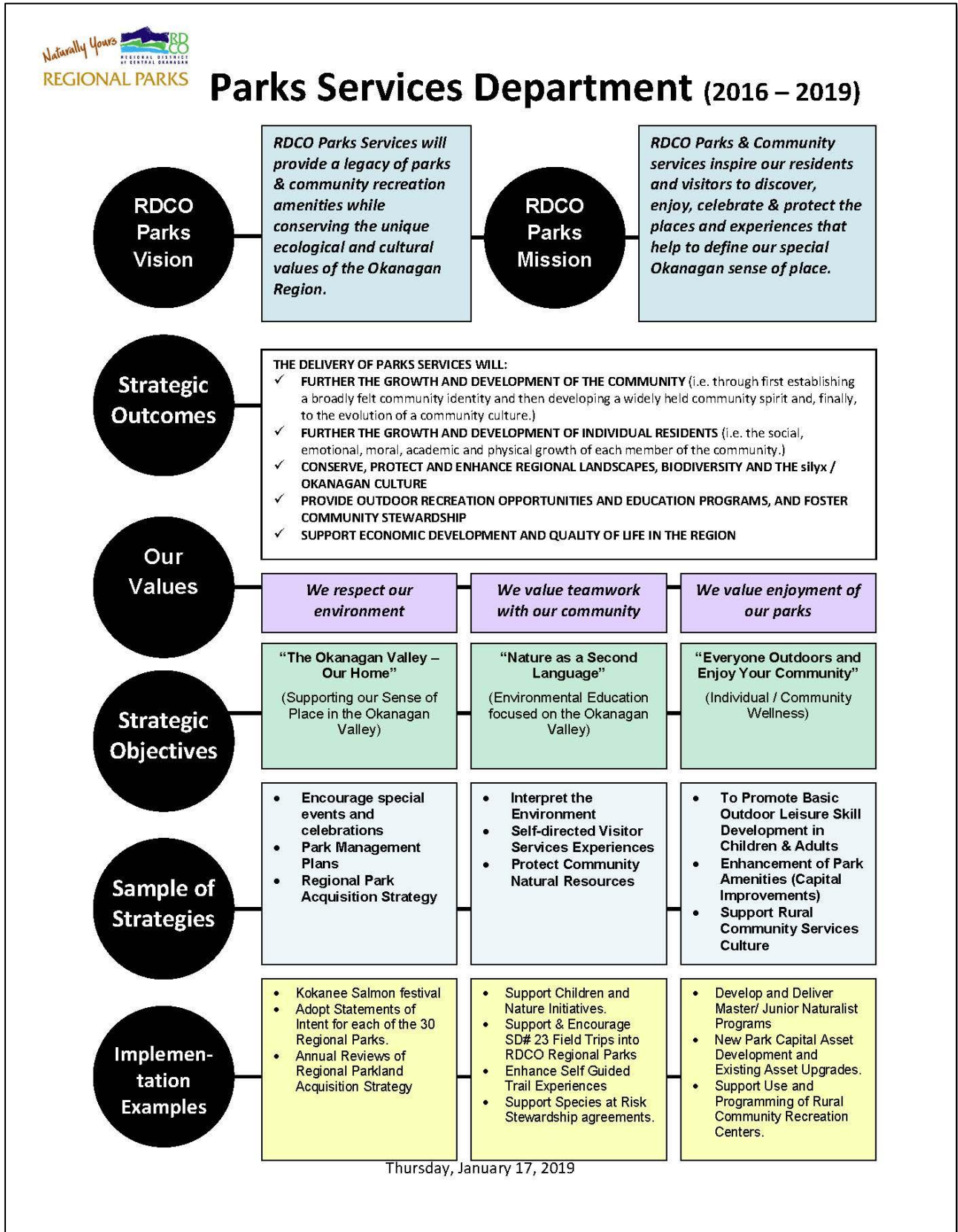
The RDCO Regional Parks Strategic Service Plan outlines priorities in three areas:

- 1. Our Past, Our Future**
- 2. Nature as a Second Language**
- 3. Everyone Outdoors and Enjoy Your Community**

Each of the above noted priorities include an objective statement and a set of implementation strategies, including:

- a) Encourage special events and celebrations;
- b) Create, implement, and maintain Park Management Plans;
- c) Protect community natural resources;
- d) Interpret the environment;
- e) Promote basic outdoor leisure skill development for all ages;
- f) Create a Parks Services brand.

The RDCO Parks Services Strategic Service Plan, summarized in the following figure, builds on RDCO Parks Services' history, successes, and initiatives over the past several years. The Plan gives Parks Services a refreshed outlook that focuses on the equitable delivery of services to all Okanagan residents and the pursuit of the discovery and enjoyment of this place we call home.



## 2.4 Current Picture – Regional Parks Today

RDCO Regional Parks protects and manages 2100 hectares (5189 acres) of spectacular and easily accessible natural areas in 30 regional parks and trails in the Okanagan Valley. The mandate of Regional Parks is to establish and protect a network of regional parks and trails in perpetuity that represents and helps maintain the diverse range of natural environments in the Central Okanagan. It provides opportunities for outdoor experiences and activities that foster appreciation and enjoyment of, and respect for, the region's natural environments. In 2018, an estimated 845,000 visits were made to regional parks and trails.

The mandate of Regional Parks is realized through four (4) department service divisions:

- (1) Parks Services Administration (PSA)**
- (2) Community Relations & Visitor Services (CRVS)**
- (3) Planning & Capital Development (PCD), and**
- (4) Parks & Resource Operations (PRO)**

Parks Services Administration (PSA) division staff are responsible for implementing department policy's as well as coordinating and delivering department administrative support to the each of department's divisions. The PSA is responsible for all interactions with the RDCO's Corporate Services Department, Municipal partner's department's and liaising with the RDCO Board of Directors on all parks service program matters.

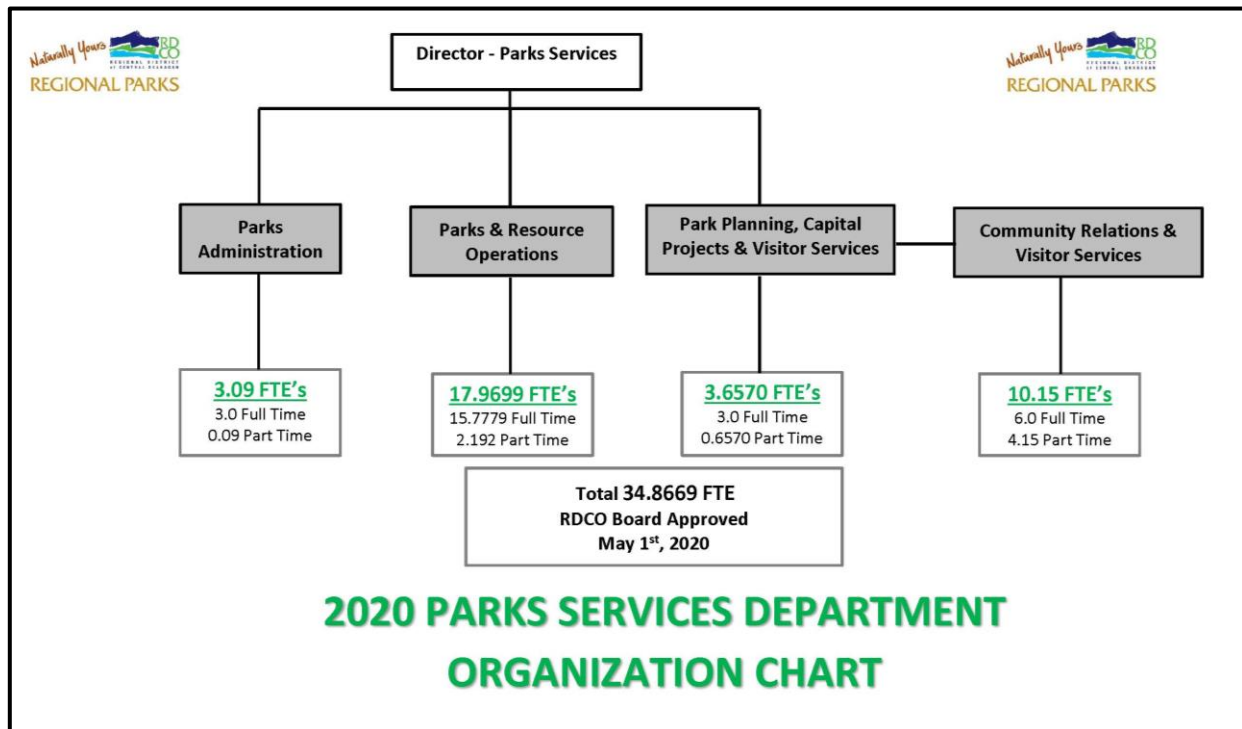
Planning & Capital Development (PCD) division staff contribute to effective and efficient decision-making through plan and policy development, progressive natural and cultural resource management, capital development planning and geographic mapping. Staff collaborate with various partners in the development of the department's Strategic Plan and park and trail management plans, provide oversight of the land acquisition program, and guide implementation of scientific and technical work related to environmental management.

Parks & Resource Operations (PRO) division staff is responsible for the daily operations and maintenance of regional parks and trails. They attend to, washrooms, trails, beaches, picnic areas, parking lots, bridges, kiosks and signs. They carry out restoration projects and fire management. Annual operating plans guide the maintenance of all regional parks and trails.

Connecting people with the natural environment, providing park partnership opportunities for residents and cultivating community partnerships are the cornerstones of the Community Relations & Visitor Services (CRVS) division. Staff provides opportunities for park visitors of all ages to learn more about their natural and cultural heritage in all RDCO Regional Parks through daily programming activities offered via the Environmental Education Center for the Okanagan

(EECO) including guided hikes, walks, school programs and special events throughout the year. In 2019 to date, a total of 43,215 people have attended these programs. CRVS staff also provide park information and publications to the public, issue park use permits for group picnic shelters and special events. As well, our well intentioned volunteers contributed many hours pursuing their community and environmental support passions by volunteering for regional parks.

## 2.5 RDCO Parks Services Organization Chart (2020)



## 2.6 The Existing Regional Parks Land Base

In July 2000 the RDCO Board adopted the RDCO's first Official Regional Park Plan (RDCO Bylaw No. 884). The Official Regional Parks Plan (ORPP) provided a vision for our system of regional parks in the Central Okanagan and established a foundation for the creation of the 2008 Regional Parks Legacy Parkland Acquisition program. The ORPP provided direction towards protecting the natural environment, providing outdoor recreation opportunities, setting regional park priorities, and providing environmental education opportunities to park users.

The ORPP park management classification system is composed of four primary park classes:

### 1. Conservation

Regional Conservation Parks are managed for the protection or enhancement of habitat values of vegetation and wildlife. The provision of recreation may occur but is subordinate to habitat values. Natural processes may take their natural course and management practices may occur at the detriment of aesthetics or public access.

### 2. Natural

Regional Natural Area Parks provide opportunities for increasing awareness and knowledge of the natural environment of the Okanagan Valley. These areas must contain regionally significant features of geology, physiography, vegetation communities, or wildlife habitat.

### 3. Recreation / Cultural / Waterfront

Regional Recreation/ Cultural/Waterfront Parks provide varied forms of more active recreation. These parks primarily focus on meeting the aquatic recreation needs of the region and/or preserve unique cultural landscapes. The management emphasis within Regional Recreation / Cultural Parks will be intensive outdoor or interpretive program day use.

### 4. Trails (Greenways)

Regional Trails will be established to link provincial, regional and major municipal parks throughout the Central Okanagan.

Development of the Regional Trail System will require collaboration with municipal and provincial park partners as well as non-government organizations in the acquisition and development of "greenway" systems that provide both recreational and habitat links to other open spaces.

These classes are separated primarily by the degree of protection afforded to the environment and the intensity of recreation use. Although most regional parks and proposed park areas will contain a mixture of these characteristics, the park class in which they are categorized will reflect the primary management focus of the park.



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## 3. Parks Services Administration (PSA)

The Regional Parks Service is the highest-cost regional district service provided by the RDCO. In 2019, the RDCO allocated \$8.04 million on the function. Of this total, 48% (\$3.87 million) was directed towards park operations, including maintenance, visitor programs, parks planning and administration. Contributions to capital, equipment and facility reserves accounted for 23.8% (\$1.91 million) of the total budget. The cost of the Service every year is recovered primarily from tax requisitions sent to participating jurisdictions. In 2019 — a typical year — taxpayers paid 95.6% (\$7.68 million) of the Service's budget. The tax burden is allocated among participants on the basis of converted assessment. The figure below from the RDCO's 2019 – 2023 5 Year Financial Plan shows the 2019 requisition for all jurisdictions. The use of converted assessment is intended to provide for the equitable distribution of costs across the service area. It recognizes that all jurisdictions benefit directly and indirectly from the system as a whole.

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF CENTRAL OKANAGAN 2019 - 2023 Five Year Program Budget Projection					
<b>Program: 142 -- Regional Parks</b>					
<b>Department: Parks &amp; Recreation</b>					
General Revenue Fund Budgets					
	2019 Budget	2020 Projected Budget	2021 Projected Budget	2022 Projected Budget	2023 Projected Budget
<b>Revenue:</b>					
Services - WFN	(273,828)	(291,142)	(297,117)	(306,519)	(309,352)
Sundry Rev. & Donations	(67,955)	(67,955)	(67,955)	(67,955)	(67,955)
Tax Requisition - Kelowna	(5,276,641)	(5,608,731)	(5,723,835)	(5,904,980)	(5,959,537)
Tax Requisition - Peachland	(230,904)	(245,436)	(250,473)	(258,400)	(260,787)
Tax Requisition - Lake Country	(576,250)	(612,517)	(625,087)	(644,869)	(650,827)
Tax Requisition - West Kelowna	(1,289,922)	(1,371,105)	(1,399,243)	(1,443,525)	(1,456,862)
Tax Req - EA Cent Ok. West	(164,599)	(174,958)	(178,548)	(184,199)	(185,901)
Tax Req - EA Cent Ok East	(150,086)	(159,532)	(162,805)	(167,958)	(169,510)
Grants	(160,238) c	(10,600) n	(10,600)	(10,600)	(10,600)
Previous Year's Surplus/Deficit	(254,648) b	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Portion of Surplus due to Y/E Accounting Entry	(22,041) a	0	0	0	0
Administration OH	525,207	530,577	539,986	565,424	567,552
Transfer from Operating Reserve	(100,000) j	(110,074) m	0	0	0
Total Revenue	(8,041,905)	(8,121,472)	(8,175,676)	(8,423,581)	(8,503,779)
<b>Expenses:</b>					
Operations	3,876,070 c,d	3,915,701 n,o	3,906,999 p	4,091,053 q	4,106,444 r
Debt Payments	2,219,007 e,i	0	0	0	0
Transfer to Equip. Reserves	141,000 f,i	143,115 f,i	145,262 f,i	147,441 f,i	149,652 f,i
Transfer to Capital	22,041	0	0	0	0
Transfer to Capital Facility Reserve	1,771,787 i	4,050,656 i	4,111,416 i	4,173,087 i	4,235,683 i
Transfer to Dist of Peachland	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000
Total Expenses	8,041,905	8,121,472	8,175,676	8,423,581	8,503,780
(Surplus) / Deficit	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	0
FTE's	31.971	30.9480	31.838	31.838	32.728
<b>Tax Levy:</b>					
Tax Requisition	(7,688,402)	(8,172,279)	(8,339,991)	(8,603,931)	(8,683,424)
Residential Tax Rate (per \$1000 of assessment)	0.1336	0.1406	0.1420	0.1451	0.1450

## **SERVICE CONTROL**

### **Decision-Making**

All decisions for the Service are made by the RDCO Board of Directors, the ultimate governing body for the Service. Decisions are made, as on all matters at the Board, using a weighted voting system that assigns a specific number of votes (and Directors) to each jurisdiction based on population.

### **Delivery**

The Regional Parks Service is delivered, primarily, using RDCO staff in the Regional Parks Department. All Parks & Resource Operations (PRO) staff members are assigned to one of three sub-regional operating units: Westside (West Kelowna, Peachland and EA Central Okanagan West), North (Kelowna, Lake Country and EA Central Okanagan East) and Central (Kelowna). This decentralization of resources places staff close to the regional parks under their care (and thus reduces travel time throughout the region). The RDCO Parks Department has traditionally relied on in-house staff to deliver most key aspects of the Parks Service, including educational and stewardship programs, park planning and natural space management. Some operational and resource management functions (e.g., turf maintenance, arboriculture activities, forest fuel mitigation, etc.) are contracted to third parties.

RDCO Parks operation of the regional parks service is enhanced by the efforts of various partner organizations and groups. In recent years the RDCO Parks Department has worked with many partners across the region to design and provide programs and special events. The list of partners includes member municipalities, non-profit groups, provincial agencies and First Nations. RDCO Parks also supports several regional park “Friends of” associations. These associations are community-based, non-profit groups that work in collaboration with RDCO staff to care for and improve individual parks in the region.

### **Operating & Risk Management Policy Framework**

Policies and procedures are an essential part of the organization as they provide a roadmap for day-to-day operations. They ensure compliance with laws and regulations, give guidance in decision-making, and streamline internal processes. Policy development within the Parks Services Department has been done on an ad-hoc basis for many decades. A 2017/18 review of the Parks Services Department policies and procedures determined that the department should evaluate and update its operating and risk management policies within the three categories of policy utilized by the RDCO: RDCO Board Policies, Administrative Policies, and Operational Procedures.

## **RDCO Board Recommendation 1 (Parks Services Administration)**

The RDCO Board should consider bringing a conclusion to it's the annual funding support of \$39,000 provided to the Friends of Fintry Provincial Park. The RDCO entered into a partnership with the Province of BC in 1995 that supported the acquisition of properties that now form Fintry Provincial Park. The RDCO's 20-year debt servicing associated with its purchase of a portion of what is now Fintry Provincial Park concluded in 2016. In 2004 the RDCO Board supported the allocation of \$30,000 in annual funding in support of the Friends of Fintry employing a full time executive director to ensure the Society could achieve the full potential of the Provincial Park site. The initial \$30,000 of financial support increased to \$35,000 in 2005, \$37,000 in 2006 and then again to \$39,000 in 2008 where it has remained for the past 11 years. After making a significant financial contribution to support the acquisition of Fintry Provincial Park and then subsequently investing over \$500,000 over a 15-year period supporting the Friends of Fintry Provincial Park, the RDCO's Regional Parks service program should refocus these funds in support of any of the above RPSR recommendations.

## **CAO Recommendation 1 (Parks Services Administration)**

The Regional Parks Service program should continue to both update and establish department administrative policies that support contemporary operations of the department in context with the RDCO's current Corporate policy framework. In addition, the Parks Services Department should continue to develop and request RDCO Board consideration for the adoption of new policies that support clear operating approaches to risk management in regional parks as well as providing clarity for desired operational service delivery levels in regional parks.

## 4. Community Relations & Visitor Services (CRVS)

Every year, the Community Relations & Visitor Services Division made over 43,000 points of contact with regional park visitors. The Visitor Services working group has been operating for 25 years and is staged from the Environmental Education Centre for the Okanagan (EECO). Visitor Services programming in the community provides opportunities for the public to get into parks and connect with nature, and to learn and understand about the importance of nature and wild spaces in our shared landscape.

The programming that is being provided is meant to be inclusive of all demographics in society, from children and teenagers to young adults and the oldest members of our community. It is also meant to be inclusive for those with physical and mental challenges and accessible to people from a wide range of incomes.

The Community Relations & Visitor Services Division support our non-profit groups through dedicated staff and funding at events such as the Kalamoier Pancake Breakfast, or through volunteering efforts such as trail building in Black Mountain - sntsk'il'ntən Regional Park. The volunteer program continues to have relatively low but steady regional park volunteerism levels and looking to the future, our aim is to focus our program support with efficient delivery of volunteer services during the seasons when volunteerism opportunities and community support are the greatest. With a predominant focus on the early – late summer season volunteer opportunities (i.e. mid May – mid September), the program should continue to seek to engage Central Okanagan residents who are seasonally available and capable to volunteer in the regional parks system.

The RDCO Regional Parks program has a portfolio of many successful Non-Government Organization (NGO) partnership projects over the past 20 years and opportunities exist for significant fundraising growth and support in this area. The Regional Parks Service program previous successful experiences with Non-Government Organization's (NGO's – i.e. Friends of Mission Creek Greenway, etc.) has a historical proven record of community fund raising capacity that offset operating and capital development costs specifically associated with the operation and installation of some park infrastructure in many regional parks.

### **CAO Recommendation 2 (Community Relations & Visitor Services)**

Resources in support of the “Volunteers in Parks (VIP)” program should be adjusted to address the past five (5) years of experiences which have better illustrated the “seasonal” context of volunteerism interests in the Central Okanagan. A reallocation of resources from the VIP program to support current and future growth opportunities via regional park focused NGO

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partnerships has been identified as a key strategic investment initiative for the period extending from 2020 - 2025. Improved coordination of numerous opportunities for partnerships with private sector and community groups could lead to service efficiency gains (for new initiatives) in the regional parks system. The Regional Parks Service program should consider facilitating the establishment of “targeted” partnerships with organizations that have a primary role aimed at fund raising to assist / offset future regional park system operating and capital development costs. Specifically support from partner organizations should be associated with the operation and installation of important park infrastructure in many regional parks and could include RDCO sponsored “partnership incentive” grants to support and leverage additional funds from outside sources. The range in timing herein represents the acknowledgement that it may take up to 5 years to see any effects of facilitating greater regional park partnership support.

## 5. Planning & Capital Development (PCD)

The 2001 Official Regional Parks Plan (RDCO Bylaw No. 884), Regional Parks Legacy Program – Ten Year Acquisition Strategy (2007 – 2017) and Regional Parks and Greenways Plan (2008) are a significant suite of documents produced for the Regional Parks Service produced prior to and applicable throughout both the 2014 and 2019 Regional Parks Service Reviews periods. The protection of natural areas, biodiversity, sensitive habitats and other environmental assets were featured prominently throughout all regional parks planning documents.

The importance of the Official Regional Parks Plan (2000) (RDCO Bylaw No. 884), Regional Parks Legacy Program – Ten Year Acquisition Strategy (2007 – 2017) and Regional Parks and Greenways Plan (2008) in a review of the Planning and Capital Development Division cannot be overstated. The Regional Parks and Greenways Plan (2008), rooted in the Regional District's Corporate Strategy, shifted the emphasis of the Regional Parks Service from outdoor recreation to environmental protection. Passive outdoor recreation, to be sure, remained an important element of the Service, as did the notion that parks exist, in part, for people. By 2008, however, it was clear that recreation must occur within the context of natural area protection. The inclusion of community stewardship and education programs in the list of fundamental goals was also a significant element of the 2008 Regional Parks and Greenways Plan. These goals recognize the importance of building respect for natural features and instilling a sustainability ethic.

The documents show, too, that within the context of natural area protection, the Regional Parks Service is intended to provide opportunities for the Central Okanagan's growing population to connect with, enjoy, be active within and learn about the region's natural environment. Both elements — environment and people — speak to the fundamental purpose of the Regional Parks service.

### **syilx / Okanagan First People & Regional Parks**

On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017 the RDCO Board of Directors entered into a Memorandum of Understanding or the Protection and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in Regional Parks with the Westbank First Nation. The land throughout the Central Okanagan has been used by the syilx (Okanagan) People since time immemorial. This traditional and continuing use has created a history that is synonymous with the land. The history is tied to the land and cannot be removed regardless of past, present or future land use or ownership. Regional Parks contain significant archaeological sites tied to that historical use. Archaeological sites include areas that contain archaeological artifacts, archaeological features, or have been identified as a Traditional Use Site. As regional park development occurs, it is incumbent upon the RDCO to ensure proper documentation, protection, and conservation of these sites. This MOU highlights the means to allow park development projects to proceed while ensuring that the shared goals of protection, conservation and education of First Nation cultural sites within regional parks are safeguarded.

## **Regional Park Land Acquisition**

The Central Okanagan is one of the most livable regions in the world. Regional parks play a crucial role in making this region a desirable place to live and visit. Ensuring regional ecosystems are protected, healthy and resilient for the long term is central to the Central Okanagan region retaining its unique sense of place. Over time, the importance of protecting regional parks and connecting people nature will only increase as the region grows and evolves. The Regional Parks Legacy Program – Ten Year Acquisition Strategy (2007 – 2017) is the RDCO Board’s strategy to protect important natural areas so the region continues to be a great place to live for current and future generations. As the 2007 plan has drawn to a close, it has become increasingly apparent that there are acquisition “gaps” in the 2019 regional park system that could be further explored in an effort to help achieve the RDCO Board’s 2019 – 2022 priorities identified as supporting (1) Transportation and Mobility, (2) Sustainable Communities, (3) Economic Development and (4) Environment.

### **RDCO Board Recommendation 1 (Planning & Capital Development)**

The RDCO Board should direct staff to develop an updated Regional Parkland Acquisition Strategy in 2020. Parkland acquisition is especially important in the Central Okanagan where rapid growth and high land costs have become the norm over the past 20 years. In the face of these challenges, expansion of the regional parks system is critical for the protection of the region’s sensitive ecosystems, and for meeting the nature based outdoor recreation needs of the region’s increasing population. The updated RDCO Regional Parkland Acquisition Strategy should consider candidate properties for each type of park in the Official Regional Parks Plan classification system as well as identify funding requirements and funding sources to implement the Strategy.

### **CAO Recommendation 3 (Planning & Capital Development)**

The Regional Parks Service program should work with syilx / Okanagan First Nations peoples, Okanagan National Alliance, the Westbank First Nation and Okanagan Indian Band to identify, create, and deliver appropriate and actionable staff training on indigenous issues and reconciliation. In addition, Parks Services Department staff should continue to work on the RDCO’s precedent-setting intergovernmental approach to the Protection and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in Regional Parks.

### **CAO Recommendation 4 (Planning & Capital Development)**

Development of a comprehensive database of qualitative and quantitative information on regional park use and user satisfaction. RDCO Parks Services should continue to invest resources into accessing current research methodologies and processes in order to develop a more comprehensive data base of both quantitative and qualitative information concerning the regional parks service program.

### **CAO Recommendation 5 (Planning & Capital Development)**

The Regional Parks Service program should continue with its long standing and budgeted interest to acquire and implement the necessary IT systems and programs which will facilitate the application, monitoring, and evaluation of performance and efficiencies of achieving parks maintenance standards (as well as other areas of performance). This will improve efficiency, effectiveness, planning, transparency and accountability. The Parks Services Department needs asset management/mapping and work order tools to keep track of its assets, develop maintenance and state of good repair plans and to assign and measure work performance. That which is measured improves and Parks Services Department is currently without any IT systems for this: it needs such a system to improve service, efficiency, responsiveness to the RDCO Board and customers.

## **CAO Recommendation 6 (Planning & Capital Development)**

Develop and document a Comprehensive Report on the Status of Current Regional Parks Infrastructure in 2020. The development of a comprehensive report on the status of the current regional park infrastructure including “linear” assets such as infrastructure associated with trails (trailhead kiosks, signs, bridges, steps, boardwalks, viewing platforms, etc.) will support the subsequent preparation of an updated Official Regional Parks Plan and it will also prepare a valuable tool for the Department to use immediately to inform decision making and the assessment of options and alternatives associated with all aspects of the provision, management and operation of the regional parks system.

## **CAO Recommendation 7 (Planning & Capital Development)**

Development of an updated Official Regional Parks Plan (ORPP). Once the development of a comprehensive report on the status of current status of the current regional park infrastructure has been completed, the Parks Services Department should focus attention on the preparation of an ORPP.

## **CAO Recommendation 8 (Planning & Capital Development)**

The RDCO’s regional parks exist to help protect and preserve, for current and future generations, the ecosystems, landscapes and natural assets of the region. Within the context of natural area protection, the regional parks system also exists to provide a range of passive outdoor recreation opportunities for the people who live in, and who visit, Central Okanagan. In concert with the completion of an updated ORPP, the RDCO Board should direct staff to create a ten-year regional parkland development capital plan that identifies the improvements that are required in each park. Using the ORPP, the parkland development capital plan should identify, for each category of regional parkland, the level and type of development that may occur (including specific facilities and works). A ten-year regional parkland development capital plan should encourage financial and operational resource focused partnerships with various “Friends of Regional Parks” groups and should identify the projected taxpayer-supported cost of



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development in the ten-year plan, as well as the distribution of planned regional parkland capital development expenditures within the region.

## 6. Parks & Resource Operations (PRO)

The RDCO's regional parks system owns or controls the largest amount of local government park land within the Central Okanagan. 2100 hectares Central Okanagan's total area is comprised of natural and maintained regional parkland, which includes 30 regional parks and 63 km of trails.

The standards for parks maintenance developed by PRO staff include:

- General Maintenance (i.e. litter and debris pick up, washroom cleaning, minor repairs of parks and park assets, and annual inspections),
- Turf Operations (i.e. integrated plant health care),
- Horticulture Operations (i.e. planting, weeding),
- Winter Maintenance and Operations (i.e. snow clearing and sanding on park roadways),
- Technical services (i.e. carpentry, plumbing, electrical, fountains, irrigation, compressors, pumps)

The primary purpose of the Parks & Resource Operations Division is to provide clean, safe and well-maintained green space and park amenities for passive and active permit use. To fulfill its purpose, the PRO division employs 17.9334 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and 2.192 (FTE) seasonal/temporary staff. Its operations are organized into three zones:

- Westside (West Kelowna, Peachland and EA Central Okanagan West),
- North (Kelowna, Lake Country and EA Central Okanagan East) and,
- Central (Kelowna)

RDCO Parks service delivery standards depend on the service area level (i.e. level of development, visitation rates, requirements for aesthetic appearance, etc.) and are organized in hierarchical manner (from highest priority with the most regular maintenance and shortest response time to the lowest priority with longest period of time between regularly scheduled maintenance operations). Some examples of service levels are provided below:

- **Level 1 Services** – the highest level of maintenance is applicable to high traffic areas. It requires shortest response time. At this level, the maintenance is aimed primarily at protection from serious deterioration and user safety (i.e. removing storm damage, removing hazardous branches and maintaining warning signs);
- **Level 2 Services** – the moderate level of maintenance services is applicable to locations with moderated level of development and visitation rates. It also requires moderate period of time between regularly scheduled maintenance operations. At this level, the maintenance is aimed primarily at preservation activities (e.g. patching asphalt and stone dust at the trail, and repairing directional signs; and
- **Level 3 Services** – a low or minimum level of maintenance is appropriate to undeveloped lands and sites that have low visitor rates. It requires longest period of time between regularly scheduled maintenance operations. At this level, maintenance is aimed primarily at remedial activities (e.g. repairing interpretive signs).

It is important to note that PRO currently does not have the IT systems and capacity to map its assets successfully or track maintenance activities by staff, by task or by location. PRO staff are cognizant of the IT limitations for the Division and in concert with PSA and PCD Divisions had previously developed a comprehensive IT approach in response to this challenge. A Parks Services Department IT strategy has approved capital funding since 2016 but is currently “on hold” until a corporate wide asset / CMMS analysis and strategy is developed. Implementation of an IT system will allow PRO to determine further efficiencies moving forward.

## **Approaches to Parks & Resource Operations Service Delivery**

Many local governments struggle trying to meet the ever expanding expectations of citizens for services, while having reduced resources to meet those expectations. In an attempt to realize savings without impacting on service quality, some local governments contract out park operations (in all or in part). However, in many local governments, existing collective agreements with unionized labour provide little or no opportunity to save costs through alternative service delivery mechanisms, leaving them with unpopular options of reducing service standards or increasing taxes.

Usually, the advantages of contracting out are cost savings, reduced liability, reduced requirements for equipment, and decreased time and overheads to recruit and support the work force. Also, public benefits will be extended because internal resources have an opportunity to focus on performing more specialized tasks. Moreover, outsourcing can increase in-house crew productivity and motivation due to the competition associated with continual comparisons to the costs of private labour for similar work. Local governments can bring contracted out work back in when staff demonstrate that they can do it better and for less or comparable costs. At the same time, a typical issue with outsourcing is a requirement for careful monitoring and contract administration. In addition, tasks and performance expectations should be clearly defined. In the case of reduced quality of contracted out services, the public will still hold the local government responsible for poor service. Based on the past five-year review and analysis of the regional parks service operations service delivery experiences, the following recommendations are provided:

### **CAO Recommendation 9 (Parks & Resource Operations)**

Over the past 5 years’ costs associated with maintenance contracts for turf maintenance and snow clearing have increased primarily due to high labour and operating costs for contactors. Contractor quality control supervision has also been placing higher resource demands on the Parks & Resource Operations (PRO) division. Parks Services Department senior staff should identify a series of regional parks that could be evaluated to identify total cost to complete the work using RDCO term employees and leased equipment. This could be completed as a pilot for select locations for a three-year period to more accurately assess and compare costs and

standards prior to consideration of a larger change in approach.

## **CAO Recommendation 10 (Parks & Resource Operations)**

Cleaning of public washrooms (in regional parks) is a workload driver that could be contracted out. RDCO Parks Services staff should examine the feasibility of entering into 3 year contracts at select urban and near urban regional park locations for less cost than the current service delivery model. This could be completed as a pilot for select urban & near urban regional park locations for a three-year period to more accurately assess and compare costs and standards prior to wider roll out.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This Report has presented the findings of the 2019 Regional Parks Service Review and was completed by the Director of Parks Services (Murray Kopp). The service review was designed to examine issues related to the administration of the Regional Parks service, the delivery approach for visitor services, community relations, environmental education and partnerships, the approaches to parkland planning, acquisition and development, and finally the regional parks program operational services model. In the RDCO Parks Department staff's view the recommendations that have been provided in this 2019 review will help to address the most pressing issues facing the RDCO's regional parks service program in the upcoming 5+ years.