



Regional Board Report

Information

Approved for Board Consideration

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Brian Reardon, CAO

To: Regional Board
From: Isabella Hodson, Supervisor - Visitor Services
Date: January 13, 2022
Subject: 2021 Regional Parks Visitor Services Program Update

Voting Entitlement: *All Directors – Unweighted Corporate Vote – Simple Majority – LGA 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 2021.

Executive Summary:

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

In 2021, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 27,633 people took part in an interpretive program or event in a Regional Park, and 171 volunteers logged 1,507 hours toward park improvement projects and initiatives. The 2021 program and events numbers are a solid improvement from the 19,500 participants identified in 2020, mid-pandemic, and well on the way to returning to pre-pandemic levels, where 43,000 participants were identified in 2019.

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Regional Board receive the 2021 Regional Parks Visitor Services Program update as attached to the report from the Supervisor, Visitor Services dated January 13, 2022 for information.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Isabella Hodson".

Isabella Hodson, Supervisor – Visitor Services

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Darlington".

Wayne Darlington,
Manager - Park Planning, Capital
Projects & Visitor Services

Attachment(s):

1. 1 - 2021 Regional Parks Visitor Services and Volunteers by the Numbers Summary Report

2. 2 - 2021 Regional Parks Visitor Services Program PowerPoint Presentation

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Priorities: Environment, Sustainable Communities

Values: Collaboration, Relationships

Background:

The Visitor Services component of Parks Services has operated for 27 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.

Although the continuing COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to the Visitor Services division, parks staff modified programming with ongoing updates to protocols and procedures in accordance with public health order updates and offered a diverse array of in-person interpretive programming supplemented by online program offerings.

From January 2nd to December 29th, 2021, Parks Visitor Services programs, events, EECO visitation, and volunteering attracted a total of 27,633 participants. While this number continues to reflect a significant decline from pre-pandemic public program participation (43,000 in 2019), it's a notable increase from the 19,500 participants of 2020. Program numbers reflect the RDCO Parks Services' strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols in British Columbia, which necessitated reduced capacity and strict health measures in all our program offerings, particularly large gatherings and events.

In-person programs returned in limited capacity in 2021, with a wide variety of guided hikes, roving, and pop-up programs offered throughout the regional parks system. 2021 also saw the addition of forest bathing, Indigenous-led programs, and partnerships with community groups and organizations that enabled RDCO Parks Services to reach more diverse audiences, including the LGTBQ2 community and seniors in care homes. These programs, through the summer months, was supported by part-time and full-time summer students, where a significant portion of summer student wages were covered by the Canada Summer Jobs Initiative and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association Youth Green Jobs Initiative.

While 2020 restrictions took away the ability of almost all Central Okanagan schools to travel to a park to take in an environmental education program, autumn 2021 saw the return of in-person school programming, with over 5,000 students partaking in programming about salmon, owls, bears, birds, and more.

Events in Regional Parks were affected by COVID-19 protocols, primarily due to group size limitations, but saw a temporary return to near-normal in 2021. Highlights of RDCO Parks event programs include a limited-registration Perseids Meteor Shower, Canada's Parks Day, Welcome the Kokanee, Kikinee Ambassador Day, Spooktacular, and the Gellatly Nut Farm Winter Light-up.

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 in a limited capacity throughout 2021 with strict protocols in place, with the busiest months being July and the return to school months of September and October.

The 2021 Volunteer in Parks (VIP) program 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 while still being physically distant. VIP Program highlights for 2021 included: food forest maintenance and education; trail and stair construction by Gellatly Bay Trails and Parks Society; invasive species removal by Friends of Kalamo and Friends of Black Mountain; nut harvest by the Gellatly Nut Farm Society; park cleanup by the Friends of Woodhaven; foreshore cleanup in partnership with Diving Dynamics, planting of trees by Ellison Primary students, weed pulling by George Pringle Elementary students; and sign cleaning and trail sanding in Mission Creek Regional Park by the We Think Outdoors Independent School students.

In total, from January through December, 27,633 park users were engaged in a park program, event, or EECO centre visit in Regional Parks, and an additional 171 volunteers logged 1,507 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 2021.

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:
