

Date: 12/06/2020

To: Chair and Directors, Committee of the Whole

And To: John MacLean, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Darron Campbell, Manager of Community Services

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Short Summary:

Proposed Establishment of a Regional Trails and Parks Service

Background:

The following is background on the proposed establishment of a Regional Trails and Parks function for the Cariboo Regional District.

The information is intended to be 'guiding principles' that will assist in the service development process and are brought forward for discussion and confirmation by the committee prior to presentation to the Regional District Board.

Currently, the Regional District has no mandate, service structure or budget for supporting the development and management of trails and parks, except within sub-regional recreation functions that exist surrounding the municipalities of Quesnel, Williams Lake and 100 Mile House. Some limited project-based support from the Regional District has been provided through grants and various economic development budgets, but this structure is not efficient or sustainable nor is it adequate to properly facilitate significant growth and management of regional trail networks.

Legislative Requirements for Service Establishment

A majority of Regional Districts in BC have regional parks and trails functions – but there are very different service levels depending on the number of properties, overall purpose and corporate priority. Most areas seem to have regional park functions that were established by letters patent in the 1970s and then were transitioned to establishment bylaws through a basic administrative process. None of the other Regional Districts contacted required or utilized a public assent process for establishment of their services.

The neighbouring regional districts to the Cariboo have parks and trails functions including Fraser Fort George, Thompson Nicola, Bulkley Nechako and Peace River. Well-developed

regional functions are also common in the Okanagan and Kootenays.

The legislative background and process for establishing a regional trails and parks service is contained in the Local Government Act and also through consultation and experience with Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Services staff.

From the LGA, a regional trails and parks function does not require a tax requisition limit in the establishment bylaw.

As a no requisition limit bylaw, establishment of the service does not require public assent, such as a referendum or alternative approval process.

Consent for the proposed establishment bylaw can be given by participating electoral area directors and through council resolution for member municipalities.

Although not directly clarified in the LGA, it is standard practice that regional trails and parks are free for public use, for example, there can't be a charge for access to cross country skiing or hiking. Most sites are day-use only without overnight camping and some regional parks do have fees and charges for special event bookings such as weddings or film-making.

Guiding Principles for establishing a Cariboo Regional District Trails and Parks Service

It is intended that the establishment of a regional function include all electoral areas and municipalities of the Regional District. This broad scope avoids future development location limitations as well as budget conflict regarding where taxation is occurring and where it is not when compared to residents, businesses and user groups benefiting from services provided.

It is intended that the new regional function avoid as much as possible overlap and duplication with trail support services currently included under existing sub-regional recreation functions, such as the mountain bike networks in the north and central Cariboo and at individual properties such as Kostas Cove and Claymine in the north Cariboo and Scout Island in the central Cariboo. It is expected these situations will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis to determine if they are more appropriately under sub-regional recreation or managed as part of the regional function - as long as it's not both.

Avoiding duplication while working in partnership with Rec Sites and Trails BC and with existing municipal trail systems is also important.

Staff recommend taking a moderate, 'organic' approach to the long-term development of a regional trails and parks service. In other words, the establishment process would not begin with an all-encompassing master plan process that seeks out properties and projects to create, which raises expectations and creates confusion with stakeholders.

Rather, the function could be established quickly and simply and the budget and staffing

resources acquired to address the immediate priorities that are driving the current discussion. These immediate project priorities would be:

1. The initial focus is on development and ongoing management of regional trails as well as connecting and growing existing trail networks.

This is consistent with the scope other regional districts have undertaken, particularly when utilizing old rail bed corridors. The Cariboo is reasonably well served by smaller, localized trail networks, such as the mountain bike or motocross networks, that are managed by specific user groups while providing broader benefits. Longer trails that cover extensive geography and cross many jurisdictions are much more difficult to establish and maintain and would be a unique priority for the proposed regional trails service.

2. A second focus is on expansion and management of the growing regional wheelchair accessible wilderness trail network.

These trail projects have been coordinated and funded by grants acquired by the Regional District since 2008. To date, all trail project locations have required a community partner to hold land tenure and/or undertake regular maintenance of the completed trail. With a trails and parks service, the Regional District could hold these tenures directly as well as provide contract maintenance funding as required. This would remove significant barriers that currently limit expansion of the low mobility trails concept.

3. A third focus is awareness and planning through engagement of key recreation organizations to determine support and priorities for activities such as cycling, equestrian, hiking and motorized trail use. All areas of the region have active non-profit groups that can be contacted and engaged.

4. A fourth priority is engaging First Nations to develop partnerships both at the concept and strategic level as well as the ground-level with respect to construction and maintenance. Several First Nation communities are also developing trail networks and training crews for ongoing maintenance. A regional trails function is an excellent opportunity to build positive relationships between various First Nation communities.

Longer term goals for future consideration

1. The current proposal is not being driven by public requests for more parks or day-use picnic sites and the region is well served by properties managed by Rec Sites and Trails BC and BC Parks. If regional park opportunities do arise, they can be individually reviewed for feasibility and considered for inclusion and development on a case-by-case basis.

2. At this time, the primary function and mandate of the service is regional recreation trails and not point-to-point active transportation routes, which are designed to offer an alternative to motor vehicle travel. Although these alternative travel options are a public desire in some areas of the region, it is also an unresolved mandate concern, particularly with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, which is provincially responsible for the safe movement of

people within road right-of-way corridors, particularly along major highways and in rural areas.

3. Similar to the issue with active transportation routes, boat launches and public access points to lakes and rivers currently fall under the provincial mandate of either the Ministry of Transportation or Rec Sites and Trails BC. Many MOTI access points were established during land subdivision and then gradually developed into semi-functional boat launches, despite the fact that neither adequate parking nor proper launching infrastructure is in place. Many of these locations represent a significant liability and a specific feasibility review should be undertaken prior to regional district involvement through the trails and parks function. That said, there may on occasion be the opportunity for new property development for lake access that can be connected to a regional park or trail asset, which is appropriately within the mandate of the parks and trails function.

4. The service may also acquire lands set aside to the Regional District during the property subdivision process. Development and management of these lands will not be an immediate priority but can be considered a potential long-term goal.

Business Plan Goals and Budget

If the establishment of a new trails and parks service is in place for 2021, the following goals and actions could be included in the initial budget.

There are several funding contribution arrangements which make logical sense to be transferred from an existing function to a new parks and trails service.

These administrative items include:

The trail maintenance contribution agreement with the Williams Lake Cycling Club (\$20,000 per year) which is currently in Central Cariboo Recreation. It is also expected a similar arrangement will be necessary with the Gold Rush Cycling Club in the north Cariboo as those local trail networks develop.

The trail development contribution with community groups in the east Cariboo (\$10,000 per year) which is currently in the Central Cariboo Economic Development budget.

The tourism site infrastructure (outhouses and garbage cans) maintenance contributions with groups in the north Cariboo (\$5,000 per year), which is currently in the North Cariboo Economic Development budget.

The highway rest stop park contribution to the Lone Butte historical site and washrooms (\$3,000 per year), which is currently in the South Cariboo Economic Development budget.

Delivery of the new trails and parks service will require a new staff position and the estimated full cost for this is \$100,000 including wages, travel, technology and basic operating budget.

Along with these budget items, funding for specific goals may be included to help make progress on key strategic goals. These costs are primarily targeted at utilizing consulting services or for grant-matching requirements.

1. Engagement, development and operational support for a cross regional cycling trail (\$20,000).
2. Review and engagement on other cross regional trails such as the Cariboo Waggon Road concept, snowmobile routes, dog sled runs and backcountry horse trails. (\$20,000).
3. Wheelchair accessible wilderness trails – identifying new opportunities for development that were previously limited without a regional trails function (\$10,000).
4. Review of public access points and boat launches on popular lakes for logical opportunities that complement and don't conflict with the mandate of Rec Sites and Trails BC or MOTI. Budget (staff time only as a first step).

The budget total for the goals and actions detailed above is \$188,000, with flexibility for increasing contribution agreements and consideration of contingency, it is recommended that the 2020 budget for a new trails and parks service be established at \$200,000 per year.

With this requisition level established over the entire Regional District, including member municipalities and based on land and improvements, the residential tax rate would be \$1.65 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

Attachments:

None.