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To: Committee of the Whole, Cariboo Regional District

And To: Murry Daly, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Darron Campbell, Manager of Community Services

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Short Summary:

Updated for Preliminary Discussion: Establishment of a Regional Trails and Parks Service.

Background:

The following is background for the proposed establishment of a Regional Trails and Parks function for the Cariboo Regional District, which would provide benefit to and is initially proposed to include all 12 electoral areas and four municipalities in the Region.

This information was first presented to the Cariboo Regional District Board in July 2020, which directed staff to engage with the municipal partners and determine level of support and procure participating council resolutions.

Most recently in June of 2022, the Regional District Committee of the Whole received the results of the municipal engagement process and resolved that the discussion of a proposed new service be deferred until after the local government elections in 2022.

The intention of this committee memorandum is to determine if there is broad support for the proposed concept prior to committing any further internal resources to the ongoing detailed development required.

Included in this item summary are the legislated requirements, guiding principles, initial priority focus and longer-term goals as well as the initial service establishment budget, tax implications and business plan goals, both new goals for the proposed service as well as goals transferred from existing services, such as sub-regional recreation and economic development.

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 immediately surrounding the municipalities of Quesnel, Williams Lake and 100 Mile House and at the 108 Greenbelt. 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 1970's 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 or referendum process for establishment of their respected 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* (LGA) and through consultation with Ministry of Municipal Affairs staff. As a no requisition limit category bylaw under the LGA, establishment of the service does not require public assent, such as a region-wide referendum or alternative approval process. Although the proposed function does not require a tax requisition limit in the establishment bylaw, if desired by the Board, the Regional District could include a taxation limit to help clearly define the overall scope of services to be provided.

Formal consent for adopting 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 general access to cross country skiing or hiking. Most sites are day-use only without overnight camping; however, 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, Scout Island in the central

Cariboo and the 108 Greenbelt in the south Cariboo. It is expected these potential overlap 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 is not both. Avoiding duplication while working in partnership with the provincial agency, 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 efficiently 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. 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 systems, such as the mountain bike, equestrian or motorized networks, that are managed by specific user groups while providing broader public 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. Expansion and management of the growing regional wheelchair accessible low mobility wilderness trail network.

These trail projects have been coordinated and funded by grants acquired by the Regional District since 2008. To date, 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 land 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. 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. Engaging First Nations to develop partnerships both at the concept level for long-term vision 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 with 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. 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 many areas of the region, it is also an unresolved mandate concern, particularly with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI), 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 MOTI 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 or revenue from Development Cost Charges 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 considered for 2026, 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 trails and parks service.

These administrative items proposed to be transferred to the new regional budget include: The trail maintenance contribution agreement with the Williams Lake Cycling Club (\$20,000 per year) which is currently in Central Cariboo Recreation and the agreement with the Gold Rush Cycling Club (\$25,000 per year) which is in North Cariboo Recreation.

The trail development contribution with community groups in the east Cariboo, such as Likely, Horsefly and Big Lake (up to \$10,000 total 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 108 beaches and trails maintenance contract through the 108 Greenbelt Commission (\$8,000) and the highway rest stop park contribution to the Lone Butte historical site and washrooms (\$4,500 per year), which is currently in the South Cariboo Economic Development budget.

Delivery of a new trails and parks service will require a staff position and the estimated full cost for this is \$110,000 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.

Specific budget goals for consideration:

1. Wheelchair accessible low mobility wilderness trails – identifying new opportunities for development that were previously limited without a regional trails function (\$10,000).
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. (\$10,000).
3. Engagement, development and operational support for a cross regional cycling trail (\$10,000).
4. Review of public access points and boat launches on popular lakes for logical opportunities that complement and do not 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 \$212,500. With flexibility for increasing contribution agreements and consideration of contingency, it is recommended that the 2026 budget for a new trails and parks service be established at \$225,000 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 about \$1.30 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

If the municipalities do not participate in the new service and taxation occurs only from the

electoral areas, the residential tax rate would be about \$1.90 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

The proposed initial budget of \$225,000 for the regional trails service would also be amended to remove some of the above cost items if they are determined to remain within the North, Central and South Cariboo subregional recreation functions, such as trail maintenance agreements and capital projects with the various non-profit groups.

In conclusion

This information is brought forward for general discussion to determine if regional trails and parks are a priority for the Cariboo Regional District. If it is confirmed by the committee that these regional initiatives are a priority and therefor require a new service function to be established, staff recommend that it include participation from all electoral areas and municipalities and have an initial tax requisition of \$225,000.

Of course, the option to not proceed with establishment of a new service does exist. Since this background information first went to the Regional District Board in 2020, and at least in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province has placed a higher value on outdoor recreation opportunities and may yet increase service levels from Rec sites and Trails BC, BC Parks and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Effectively leaving the mandate and responsibility for the development of rural and regional trail and park assets with these other agencies will remove the demand for the Regional District to be involved.

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