

Mountain Forest Regional Park



Interim Management Guidelines

Capital Regional District | October 2024



Capital Regional District | Regional Parks
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1. Context

1.1 Background

The Capital Regional District (CRD) and the Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) partnered to purchase the 19.86-hectare (49-acre) Mountain Forest Regional Park property (the property) on November 29, 2021. This acquisition was primarily funded by the CRD, with support from HAT through a fundraising campaign that attracted over 1,440 donors. The former landowner additionally contributed through Canada's Ecological Gifts Program, which encourages private landowners to donate ecologically sensitive land for habitat conservation and offers tax incentives.

The property is located in the District of Saanich and the traditional territory of multiple First Nations, who have stewarded the land since time immemorial (Map 1). Prior to its acquisition, the property served as a valuable greenspace for the surrounding neighbourhood. Community members maintained a network of pathways that connect to surrounding areas and offer valuable nature-based recreation opportunities. Since the acquisition, CRD staff have begun repairing and improving sections of existing trails to ensure they are safe for public use and minimize impacts to the natural environment. Current public uses are primarily dog walking, hiking and running, as well as cycling and horseback riding on select trails.

Located within the Coastal Douglas-fir Moist Maritime Biogeoclimatic Zone, the property is primarily covered by mature, second-growth Coastal Douglas-fir forest. It additionally includes areas of Garry oak meadow, rock outcrop and arbutus, which comprise some of Canada's rarest and most imperiled ecosystems. Several species at risk have historically been observed within the property, including little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), northern red-legged frog (*Rana aurora*), common nighthawk, (*Chordeiles minor*), western screech owl (*Megascops kennicottii kennicottii*), band-tailed pigeon, (*Patagioenas fasciata*) and olive-sided flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*). Further research is needed to verify the presence and location of these species within the property. Excelsior Creek flows through the property and is part of the Colquitz River watershed, an important river system in the region that supports native salmon and trout species. A Baseline Documentation Report was prepared for the HAT prior to the acquisition of the property which provided a detailed account of its ecology, as well as potential threats and mitigation measures.

Under Saanich's *Official Community Plan Bylaw 2023*, the property is located in rural Saanich and is designated as Parks. The Rural Saanich Local Area Plan provides additional context and land use planning direction for the property at the neighbourhood level. Under Saanich's *Zoning Bylaw 2003*, the property is zoned Recreation and Open Space (P-4). A conservation covenant, registered on title by HAT, ensures the property is managed to protect its unique natural features. Additionally, under the Ecological Gifts Program, the CRD is responsible for maintaining the property's biodiversity and environmental heritage values in perpetuity.

1.2 First Nations Reconciliation

Reconciliation Goal 1, within the *Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032* (Strategic Plan), is to pursue “Strong, collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations through working in partnership.” Priority action 1-1a within the Strategic Plan supports this goal and sets out that the CRD will “Work collaboratively with First Nations to develop and implement priority initiatives related to regional parks and regional trails, such as: Involving First Nations in land acquisition and park management planning and operations.”

To date, six First Nations have been identified as having asserted Territory over the property. These include the x̓sepsum (Esquimalt Nation), BO̓KÉCEN (Pauquachin First Nation), Songhees Nation, WJOLÉLP (Tsartlip First Nation), S̓ÁUTW (Tsawout First Nation) and the WSIKEM (Tseycum First Nation). CRD staff will collaborate with First Nations, during the lifespan of this Interim Management Guidelines (IMG) and beyond, to identify and pursue opportunities that respect and support First Nations’ rights and self-determination. The CRD will collaborate with interested Nations to establish a name for the park and upon completion of the park management plan will replace the temporary designation of Mountain Forest Regional Park (also known as Mountain Road Forest) assigned when it was acquired.

1.3 Purpose and Connection to the Parkland Acquisition and Management Planning Processes

Securing and managing parks and protected areas is a resource-intensive process that benefits from collaboration with external partners. The CRD frequently engages with various organizations and agencies to identify and acquire new regional parkland. The acquisition of the property is an example of such a collaborative effort and involved partnering with HAT to identify the property as a valuable addition to the CRD’s regional parks and trails system. The acquisition was then facilitated through the CRD’s Land Acquisition Strategy 2020-2021 and supported by the CRD’s Land Acquisition Fund. The process involved working closely with HAT and local community members, evaluating the property against a comprehensive set of acquisition criteria, negotiations with the property owner and securing approval from the CRD Board.

The purpose of this IMG document is to guide how CRD staff will manage the property prior to a park management plan being in place. This includes providing guidance on site securement and how the property is to be utilized on an interim basis. It further guides building relationships and gathering information needed to inform a future management planning process.

The development of a park management plan is a multi-year process which involves extensive First Nations, stakeholder and public engagement, and approval by the CRD Board. The management plan will specify actions aimed at achieving a long-term vision for the park. Once a park management plan has been prepared, the IMG will no longer be used to manage the property.



2. Park Classification

The Strategic Plan establishes a park classification system that is used to assign each regional park one of four classifications based on the intended management outcome. Due to its ecological significance and to support the conservation covenant registered on title and terms of Canada's Ecological Gifts Program, the property is classified as a **Conservation Area**. As outlined within the Strategic Plan, the purpose of this classification is "to protect species or ecological communities at risk and to offer visitor opportunities that are primarily focused on interpretation of natural and cultural features." Other similar parks with the Conservation Area classification include Mill Hill, Witty's Lagoon, Francis/King, and Island View Beach.

3. Interim Park Management Goals

The following interim park management goals are applicable to all park acquisitions and establish the outcomes of implementing the IMG to help to prioritize efforts and resources. They are intended to provide the necessary groundwork for securing the site and undertaking the future development of a park management plan.

1	Build Relationships Identify First Nations, local governments, partners and stakeholders interested in the management of the property and develop working relationships to identify shared goals and future opportunities for collaboration.
2	Gather Information Gather baseline archaeological, cultural heritage, ecological, outdoor recreation and infrastructure information to identify park values and priorities to be included within a future park management plan.
3	Protect Park Values Conduct site securement, including addressing interim operational, cultural, conservation and outdoor recreation needs to protect known and potential park values.

4. Interim Management Actions

The following table outlines a series of interim management actions that will guide the operation of the property over the lifespan of the IMG.

Interim Management Actions	Timing
Reconciliation	
Work with involved First Nations to identify the property's archaeological and cultural significance, including areas, features and species of importance, prior to conducting ground altering works	Ongoing
The management of archaeological and cultural heritage sites will be undertaken in accordance with provincial legislation and following discussions with involved First Nations	Ongoing
Identify opportunities to partner with involved First Nations to undertake conservation and restoration projects aimed at protecting and strengthening cultural values that could be included as actions within a future park management plan	Ongoing
Collaborate with involved First Nations to establish a name for the park, in accordance with the CRD's <i>Regional Parks and Regional Trails Naming Convention Policy</i>	Short-term
Conservation	
Inventory and monitor ecological values and recreational use impacts to identify potential threats and implement necessary mitigation measures, such as decommissioning or rerouting trails, modifying permitted activities or park use	Ongoing
Implement the CRD's <i>Impact Assessment Process</i> and best management practices to mitigate potential impacts on the natural environment	Ongoing
Identify and manage property encroachments	Ongoing
Explore opportunities to acquire land around the property that contains sensitive habitat and/or improves connectivity to surrounding areas	Ongoing
Identify opportunities to restore and enhance ecological values in the park, including critical and sensitive habitat	Medium-term
Complete an assessment of priority invasive species within the property and identify appropriate management actions	Medium-term
Visitor Experience	
Identify visitor safety hazards	Ongoing
Document visitor-use patterns to better understand recreational values	Ongoing
Enforce <i>Capital Regional District Parks Regulation Bylaw No. 1, 2018</i>	Ongoing
Under the CRD's <i>Dog Management Policy Framework</i>, dogs may be off leash but must remain under effective control at all times	Ongoing

Maintain the existing trail connecting Mountain Forest Road and Excelsior Road as a mixed-use hiking/cycling/equestrian trail and all other established trails as hiking trails to maintain connectivity for existing user groups while mitigating impacts to sensitive habitat	Ongoing
Assess visitor needs and identify potential locations for a future park entrance hub (typically includes an entrance sign, vehicle parking area, information kiosk, bicycle rack, toilet building and waste receptacles) and other visitor amenities	Ongoing
Prepare an interim sign plan to guide the installation of necessary park orientation and regulation signage at key trail accesses and intersections	Short-term
Provide information on the CRD's website informing the public of what outdoor recreational opportunities are available on the property and what visitor amenities can be expected in the interim	Short-term
Install minimum amount of park infrastructure needed to secure the site	Short-term
Assess a rerouting of the entrance trail at the north end of Mountain Forest Road to provide an increased buffer from adjacent private properties	Medium-term
If visitation rates increase, consider repurposing the cleared area, where the former landowner's residence was located, as an interim parking area for four to six vehicles and remediating the existing informal parking area at the Quayle Road park entrance	Long-term

Climate Action & Resiliency

Identify opportunities to mitigate climate change, including facilitating active transportation to and from the property and identifying how park trails can support regional active transportation that could be included as actions within a future park management plan	Ongoing
Identify opportunities to adapt to climate change, including identifying natural hazards to and from the property and necessary mitigation measures that could be included as actions within a future park management plan	Long-term

Access & Equity

Consider undertaking an assessment to identify accessibility and equity barriers and opportunities for improvement that could be included as actions within a future park management plan	Long-term
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5. Implementation Strategy

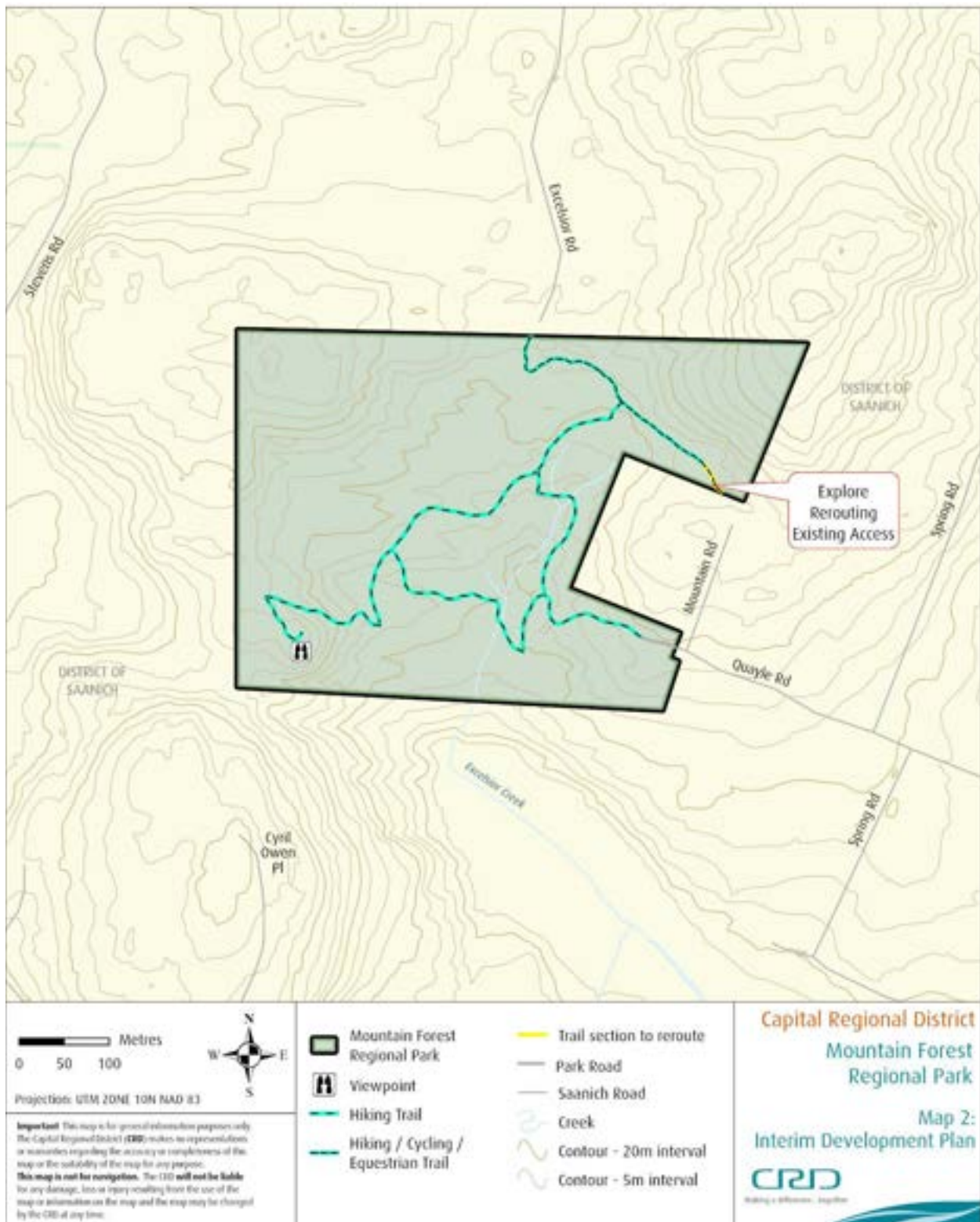
5.1 Interim Development Plan

The Interim Development Plan establishes the location of key infrastructure and visitor amenities that will be available while the IMG is in place (Map 2). It should be noted that this plan is temporary and subject to change once a park management plan has been prepared for the property. The management planning process will include opportunities for First Nations, stakeholders and the public to provide

feedback on the development plan, including what park infrastructure and visitor amenities are included. The types of infrastructure and resources dedicated to installation during the IMG stage are therefore limited and selected accordingly.

5.2 Monitoring and Review

At the beginning of each year, CRD staff will prepare an annual operating plan (AOP) for the property, which will outline the interim management actions that are to be completed within the property over the year, including estimated timelines and required resources. Monitoring of the implementation status of the IMG will occur during the preparation of the AOP and will provide an opportunity for staff to review implementation progress, identify outstanding management actions or new actions that are to be completed and evaluate the success of completed or ongoing management actions.



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