

# Volunteers in Parks



## Volunteer Services Plan

by Nadine Collison

As Regional Parks has grown, so has the role of volunteers. As a result, the 2022-2032 CRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan identified the need for a long-term Volunteer Services Plan (2026-2031) which the CRD Board approved in early June. In light of this recent approval, it's worth reflecting on volunteering in CRD regional parks over the years and looking forward to plans and hopes for the future.

Volunteer involvement in regional parks dates back to the CRD's and the Regional Parks Service inception in 1966. It began with spontaneous acts of goodwill - individual visitors removed branches that were blocking trails, picked up litter and relayed information to staff about trail and facility conditions. In 1982, the program was formalized with the launch of the Volunteer Beekeeper and Volunteer Warden (now known as Park Stewards) programs.

In 2003, Regional Parks completed a Volunteer Services Plan titled A Natural Return - Volunteers in Regional Parks and Trails, which outlined priority actions for implementation between 2003 and 2005.

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A restoration volunteer, John, in his natural habitat amongst the Scotch broom in Mill Hill Regional Park.



Volunteer naturalist Sharon with the rough-skinned newts at the nature house.

This plan provided strategic direction for volunteer activities and engagement during that period. Since then, the regional parks system has expanded to include 34 regional parks, encompassing over 13,350 hectares of parkland. In 2025, more than 630 volunteers contributed over 8,200 hours to improving our parks and connecting with the community, which is a growth of 23% over 2024, and more than double what it was five years ago. Regional Parks hosted 139 restoration events and volunteers engaged over 8,800 park visitors.

This growth in volunteering was in part what spurred the need for a Volunteer Services Plan. In order to develop the Plan, staff reviewed trends, issues and challenges that are occurring on national and local levels, as well as feedback and considerations from the Volunteer Satisfaction Survey that was conducted in 2023.

### National Trends and Challenges

Every five years, Statistics Canada conducts a survey on giving, volunteering and participating. Using the results from the most recent survey (2023), along with conferences, forums, and sector-wide discussions from other organizations like the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada, Volunteer Canada, and Volunteer Victoria, national trends and challenges were identified:

- Declining participation: Formal volunteering has decreased nationally from 44% in 2013 to 32% in 2023, but the CRD’s Regional Parks program is growing! In the Volunteer Satisfaction Survey, volunteers expressed how important it is for them to be out in nature, get exercise and enjoy the parks while also volunteering, an insight into potentially why the Regional Parks Volunteer Program is still experiencing growth.
- Mutual benefit: Volunteers are looking for a more reciprocal relationship that meets the goals of both the organization and the volunteers.
- Accessibility: There is a growing expectation to have inclusive and accessible volunteer opportunities.
- Equity and decolonization: Programs are expected to evolve with diversity, equity and inclusion and incorporate decolonizing practices.
- Virtual engagement: A desire for online and remote opportunities continues to grow.
- Flexibility: Volunteers increasingly seek episodic, convenient and adaptable opportunities.

These national survey results helped inform the Volunteer Plan and led us to ask how we could meet these challenges and opportunities.

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### Volunteer Satisfaction Survey

The national trends and challenges allow us to look outward, but the Volunteer Satisfaction Survey that was conducted in 2023 provides a window for us to look inward. According to the survey results, volunteers reported high levels of satisfaction and the program was described as well organized. 96% of volunteers would recommend our volunteer program to a friend or loved one.

However, some areas for improvement were identified, which included:

- Diversifying the demographics of our volunteers
- Enhancing our reporting and data collection
- Building community among volunteers in the program

By considering and weighing both the national challenges and trends and the volunteer satisfaction survey, we were able to define the goals of the 2026-2031 Volunteer Plan.

### Volunteer Services Plan Objectives

The following objectives will guide the CRD Regional Parks volunteer program over the next five years:

#### 1) Diversify the Volunteer Base

- Engage a broader demographic, including youth, BIPOC communities, and people with disabilities.
- Identify and address barriers to participation for underrepresented groups.
- Develop recruitment partnerships with newcomer programs, cultural organizations, youth groups, and disability organizations.
- Offer flexible scheduling and varied opportunities to attract new demographics.

#### 2) Promote, Recognize and Appreciate Volunteers

- Strengthen promotion of volunteer opportunities through social media, signage, and other communication channels.
- Improve data collection and reporting to highlight volunteer achievements (e.g., before-and-after restoration pictures, invasive species removal totals).
- Continue meaningful recognition through events, tokens of appreciation, and regular acknowledgement.

#### 3) Foster Opportunities for Learning and Connection

- Provide ongoing education, training and skill-building opportunities.
- Create more opportunities for volunteers to connect socially, both in-person and digitally.

#### 4) Update and Maintain Program Administration

- Uphold the high standards of the CRD Regional Parks Volunteer Program.
- Refresh the volunteer mission and vision.
- Update policies, procedures and handbooks, ensuring they are accessible online.

Each of these four objectives is broken down further into targeted plans and timelines, giving the volunteer program a strong and sustainable direction for the next five years as we continue to grow!



Happy and tired restoration volunteers returning at the end of a session.

# Story of the Sentinels: The Pipeline Trail Invasive Weed Removal Group

by Neil Neate

My adventures within the invasive weed removal realm in CRD regional parks started in those early COVID days when the BEES (Beaver Elk Environmental Stewards) got busy pulling ivy and other invasives in the park. I heard about a similar group operating along the Pipeline Trail (off of Pipeline Rd. leading up to Beaver Lake) and cycled down to introduce myself. Silke Sommerfeld was leading the group at that time and she warmly welcomed me to the fold of four or five volunteers working alongside the Pipeline Trail (shout-out here to Silke, John, Di, Doreen, Kate, Becky and others!)

I remember the early days of our Pipeline gang with Colleen Long, our CRD minder at that time, gathering us in a wide circle, adhering to the CRD's COVID two-metre separation from each other, advising us of the rules for safe invasive weed eradication in those crazy pandemic times.

One of the procedures at that time was to gather the invasives removed, almost completely ivy in those Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park lands, and put them into immense cubical vinyl bags for transportation to the Hartland Landfill. Well, I lived in the neighbourhood and maintained a lively compost pile in my own backyard and I could add the ivy to. I began the practice of composting our invasives from this site in small local piles, which I soon dubbed as Sentinels, my strong silent protectors in the deep forest.

My personal methodology for ivy removal sees me pull the long vines from the forest floor, looping them back and forth six or eight times until it's a fistful, a length of 30cm or so, then tightly wrapping the bundle with the remaining vine, creating a nice compact package. I end up with a rugby ball-sized bundle of compostables that I gather on my trusty little tarp, and then use to create the Sentinels. These piles of ivy are sometimes surprisingly tall (hence their name). I find that my tight bundling of the ivy facilitates the construction of a Sentinel, often a metre in diameter as well as height, and occasionally 1.2m or even taller when I pay attention to the construction of the piles. I like to think of the Sentinels' presence around me, as I pull ivy, keeping me content that my efforts are in tune with the ecology of the incredible park that I just love to work in.

We move on to other invasives in Victoria's summer drought period and the Sentinels, strong and silent in their stealthy forest vigil, slowly dry out, desiccating and reducing their height by half or more in the first dry season. I make sure to check the Sentinels multiple times through the year, to ensure that ivy is not growing from them. Some of my Sentinels from past seasons have shrunk and are barely noticeable in the forest floor litter, returning their carbon and nutrients to the soil, to Mother Earth.

It gives me great pleasure to walk in the forests of Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park, observing the Sentinels from my ivy-clearing exploits, past gentle mounds of life-giving compost, alive with worms and beetles and ants and all sorts of microbial things.



Neil and one of his Sentinels  
Photo: D. LeFrank

If you are interested in joining Neil and the rest of the Pipeline Stewardship group removing invasives, email Nadine at [ncollison@crd.bc.ca](mailto:ncollison@crd.bc.ca)

# Species Spotlight: Contorted-pod Evening Primrose

by Emily Ryan



If you have had the chance to work in some of our coastal sand ecosystem sites, like the ones at Island View Beach and Witty's Lagoon regional parks, you may have been informed that much of your effort to remove Scotch Broom is being done to help protect highly endangered coastal plants such as the Contorted-pod Evening Primrose. While this plant is one that some of us may never see, it remains one of the most important to protect given its imperiled, red-listed status and incredibly rare presence across Canada. In fact, according to the BC Conservation Data Centre, this plant has only been identified in eight places in BC!

Also known as Twisted or Contorted-pod Suncup, this tiny annual makes a very short appearance in the spring months and attempts to spread its seeds before the harsher summer or winter months. Its presence ranges from Baja California up the Western coastline with rare appearances in the Pacific Northwest.

In British Columbia, only a few sites provide habitat for this incredibly at-risk coastal plant: Savary Island and, in closer proximity, Sidney Spit and Island View Beach and Witty's Lagoon regional parks. However, recreational use makes it difficult for this plant to survive.

Competition from invasive species like Scotch broom and introduced dune grasses also create immense hurdles for this plant and others that should thrive in coastal dune ecosystems.

An herb, *Camissonia contorta* grows from a single taproot, anchored in shifting sand dunes. Its stems are reddish, wiry, and hairlike, often crawling along the ground. Flowers, if seen, are small and yellow in colour. It favours non-shaded, backshore sandy environments with moderately stable substrates.

Should you see this plant, take great care in walking near it and, if possible, alert CRD staff to its location by taking a few quick coordinates. When visiting our local beaches, keeping dogs on leash and staying on recreational trails and out of fenced areas is the best action one can take to protect this special and highly elusive plant.

CRD Regional Parks staff have taken measures in the last several years to protect threatened species in coastal sand ecosystems at Island View Beach and Witty's Lagoon regional parks through the installation of fencing and signage to mitigate visitor impacts. Discussions are underway to assess feasibility of further actions to protect these important species and their habitat. Staff continue to monitor these rare plants with the support of dedicated community volunteers.

# Staff Profile: John Kang, Stewardship Technician

## Tell us a bit about yourself!

Hello, my name is John Kang. I was born in South Korea, but I grew up in Saanich since I was around four years old. University of Victoria was where I completed my undergraduate degree and currently, finishing up my MSc in Environmental Science with Thompson Rivers University. I like to chat about science, nature, sports, or anything that helps me understand the world better. I also like to camp and watch movies in theatres, but my main hobby is playing tennis. As the captain of my team in a local doubles league, I have learned where most of the tennis courts are in the CRD!

I have been working as a Restoration Assistant since 2022 where my passion for ecological restoration got me started. I help run restoration events in our regional parks where there are either invasive species to remove or rare plants to conserve. My day usually starts with discussing the day's plan, packing the truck, running an event, and unloading invasive species biomass into bins.



John - out and about  
Photo: J. Kang

## What do you enjoy most about working at Regional Parks?

My favourite part of working at Regional Parks is making connections with returning or new volunteers. I have the wonderful opportunity to learn about the daily lives of volunteers who care about nature in some way. During events, I love to observe nature such as a tree frog hopping in the grass or pollinators on flowers. Being around plants throughout the year allows me to notice subtle phenological changes such as how invasive species grow from seed and respond to different environments. The overall ecology is incredible in regional parks, and I love to show volunteers cool finds to rally behind the importance and results of their efforts. I also like receiving insider information when being one of the first alerted to new potential invasive plants in the region.

# Park Updates



The newly constructed trail at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park after a landslide in the winter destroyed the original trail.

- A landslide occurred last winter along a section of the Beach Trail at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park, resulting in a trail closure through winter and into spring. In February, the CRD Regional Parks Trail Crew began rerouting 300 metres of the trail and decommissioning and re-naturalizing the former route. Thanks to the crew's dedication and hard work, the improved trail reopened at the beginning of May.
- The Protect CRD Parks public awareness campaign launches this month and runs until the end of July. The campaign highlights three simple habits that help keep parks healthy: staying on designated trails, leaving no trace, and following park rules. Watch for shareable social media content, radio ads, temporary in-park signage, and park rangers and interpreters engaging visitors with the Protect CRD Parks message. Small actions make a big difference – when every visitor does their part, regional parks remain wild, healthy, and welcoming for generations. For more etiquette tips and park information, visit [www.crd.ca/parksafety](http://www.crd.ca/parksafety).
- The Teaching Shelter at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park was recently struck by a falling tree and will be closed until further notice while staff assess the damage and plan repairs. Built in 2009, the Teaching Shelter serves as a meeting point and bookable outdoor learning space for CRD nature programs, local schools, and environmental leadership initiatives. Watch for an update on the status of the repairs in the upcoming newsletters.



Damage to the Teaching Shelter from a fallen tree at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park at the end of May.