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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2017

SUBJECT **Dogs in Regional Parks**

ISSUE

To provide information about dogs in regional parks and on regional trails.

BACKGROUND

Capital Regional District (CRD) Bylaw No. 3682 (as amended by Bylaw No. 3879) regulates the use of regional parks and trails. It applies to all regional parks and trails and any other lands owned in fee simple, held under a lease by the CRD or by way of an easement or statutory right of way and managed as a regional park.

Section 8 of the bylaw, Animals in Regional Parks, includes direction to have the animal under control at all times, to not allow the animal to injure, disturb or molest any person, domestic animal or wildlife, to have a leash and collar for each dog at all times and to remove dog waste. The bylaw also lists 11 parks that have restrictions on beaches and in picnic areas in the summer where dogs are not allowed unless leashed and just passing through (Attachment 1).

Signs are in parks and on regional trails to explain regulations. Information is also posted on the CRD website and printed in brochures. The multi-year project to update regulatory park signs includes standards for symbols and wording about dogs. The main messages are “keep your dog under control” and “pick up after your dog”. As of March 2017, 12 parks out of 30 have been re-signed. Some older general information signs and some older brochures have wording that encourages visitors, as part of trail etiquette, to also keep their dogs on the trail.

Regional Parks staff work with CRD Bylaw Enforcement Officers who monitor and enforce applicable animal control regulations. Bylaw Officers patrol the parks and trails and warn verbally or enforce through a written notice when visitors are not complying with the bylaw. Recorded observations by parks staff, volunteers and Bylaw Officers of incidents involving dogs in 2015 and 2016 show the infractions most often observed are: dogs not under control, dogs on beaches or in picnic areas during the restricted season, dogs disturbing people or wildlife, dogs in prohibited areas, and failure to remove dog waste.

The recent CRD Board-approved Regional Trails Management Plan states that dogs must be on leash on all 3 regional trails. Before approval of the plan, only the Lochside and E&N trails required dogs to be on leash. Signs with this message are in place along the Lochside and E&N. Signs on the Galloping Goose currently say “keep your dog under control” and “pick up after your dog”. The signs will be updated in 2017 to say “keep dogs on leash”.

The CRD Board-approved management plan for Sea to Sea Regional Park requires dogs to be on leash in the entire park. This on-leash rule will also apply to Sooke Hills Wilderness once the park and the main trail are opened in the summer of 2017.

The Regional Trails have all been designated as on-leash areas. Presently, management of dogs in Regional Parks is addressed on a park-by-park basis, through the development of individual management plans. This management approach could be adjusted by applying an overall regional approach.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Regional Parks staff keep track of reports regarding the parks and trails, including complaints about dogs. Thetis Lake, Elk/Beaver Lake and Island View Beach receive the most complaints. In addition to the incidents previously identified, dogs charging at or attacking people or other dogs, and commercial dog walkers with dogs off leash and not under control are of concern.

Statistics on Observations – as recorded by staff, volunteers and bylaw officers

Year	Dog not under control	Dog on beach or picnic area, Jun 1-Sep 15	Dog disturbing people or wildlife	Dog in prohibited area	Failure to remove dog feces (recent evidence)
2015	198	505	82	50	725
2016	115	638	39	62	556

The above table, illustrating the reported incidents involving dogs, cannot be interpreted as trends in dog occurrences. To address trends, a comprehensive monitoring program would be required over a period of time. What remains unknown and of concern are the number of people who have stopped visiting Regional Parks because of negative dog experiences or those who will never visit Regional Parks because of the presence of off-leash dogs.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Regional parks serve to protect species and their habitats while inviting visitors to enjoy the natural environment. Parklands are increasingly becoming the last remaining intact habitat for wildlife and bird species as lands within the CRD are transformed for purposes other than conservation. Wildlife and birds already competing with outdoor recreation users are further disturbed and placed under additional stress as a result of dogs chasing them or flushing them out.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

CRD Bylaw No. 3675 outlines the fees and charges for use of Regional Parks' services and facilities. Although one fee category is for commercial businesses, dog walking companies have not been required to obtain a permit and pay a fee to be in regional parks.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Dogs must be on leash at all times in national parks. In BC provincial parks, dogs must be on leash at all times, except in some parks that have off-leash areas and designated swimming areas for dogs.

Municipalities and Electoral Areas in the regional district have a variety of regulations. In general, dogs may not run at large and must be kept under effective control. Some parks, beaches and playgrounds within municipalities are off limits to dogs or require them to be on leash.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Regional Parks Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

That this report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Mike Walton, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

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Attachments: Attachment 1 – Dog Restrictions on Beaches and in Picnic Areas