

Section 2 – RDN Regional Parks

2.1 Regional Parks and Trails

The RDN Regional Parks function was established in 1989. Regional parks are lands deemed to be significant for the population of the whole region. As a result, the costs associated with acquiring regional parks and of developing major capital items within regional parks are funded by residents of the eight electoral areas. The operation of regional parks (maintenance costs, etc) is shared by agreement among the four municipalities (City of Nanaimo, City of Parksville, Town of Qualicum Beach, and District of Lantzville) and the electoral areas.

Descanso Bay Regional Park, located in Electoral Area 'B', is one of seven regional parks and one of two regional campgrounds. Other Regional Parks include: Nanaimo River in Electoral Area 'A'; Benson Creek Falls above Brannen Lake in Electoral Area 'D'; Beachcomber in Electoral Area 'E'; Little Qualicum River in Electoral Area 'F'; Englishman River Regional Park and Little Qualicum River Estuary Regional Conservation Area both located in Electoral Area 'G' and Horne Lake Regional Park in Electoral Area 'H' (*see Map No. 2.1*).

In 1994, the "Official Regional Park Plan Designation Bylaw 921, 1994" was adopted. Bylaw No. 921 is a guiding document that recognizes existing and potential parks and open space sites in the region, including Regional Parks. This Bylaw also advocates actions to secure and manage parks and open spaces, and defines various means by which the RDN can secure parkland. The vision and goals of Bylaw No. 921 are outlined in Section 2.2 and 2.3. It is anticipated that Bylaw No. 921 will be reviewed within the next two years to reflect the changes that have occurred within the regional park system since 1994 as discussed below.

Bylaw No. 921 establishes three park service types; regional park, greenbelts, and community parks, in addition to further park land classification. Campgrounds were not identified as being part of the Regional Park Function in Bylaw No. 921; therefore, the proposed Regional Park Plan revision must include this use as part of the regional park function. In addition, other changes have occurred that need to be reflected in a new regional park plan. These changes include, but are not limited to, the extent of regional park acquisitions, the repeal of the provincial ***Parks Regional Act*** and partnerships that have been formed to acquire and manage three Regional Parks.

It is anticipated that the proposed Regional Park Plan revision will be a broad policy document that defines the RDN's capacity to acquire, develop, maintain and manage regional parks, trails, and open spaces. It is also expected that park plans will be developed for each Electoral Area where a community based vision for locally significant parks, trails, and open spaces is identified. In addition, Electoral Area park plans are anticipated to outline strategies for the acquisition, protection, development and management of community parks and open spaces in the individual plan area. Electoral

Area 'E' is currently the only Electoral Area for which a community parks plan has been developed. Together the revised Regional Park Plan and the Electoral Area parks plan will provide comprehensive guidance for parks planning in the RDN.

2.2 Parks System Plan – Vision

The vision for the regional park system defined in Bylaw No. 921 considers the public's desire, legal constraints, the spirit and intent of the park services, and the needs of the Regional District of Nanaimo. It is outlined as follows: *The Regional District will establish, develop and operate a park system for the security, protection and stewardship of lands within the region which maintain livability, provide environmental and natural resource protection and accommodate outdoor recreational pursuits.*

2.3 Parks System Plan – Goal

The goal for regional parks as outlined in the Regional Park plan is as follows:

To secure and protect for all time, a system of park sites and trails, which provide representation of the four distinct landscapes of the region, as well as sites that include unique natural and historic features and experiences of regional significance. Regional parklands will accommodate the enjoyment and appreciation of the sites in a manner that assures their natural qualities are unimpaired for generations to come. Regional trails will provide for linear outdoor recreational opportunities that link components of the Regional District Park System, other park and protected areas, and the neighbourhoods of the Regional District.

Pursuant to the criteria outlined in Bylaw No. 921 and the factors described in Section 3 of this Plan, Descanso Bay Regional Park meets the criteria of a regional park.