

RECREATION & PARKS *master plan*



GABRIOLA, MUDGE & DECOURCY ISLANDS
(ELECTORAL AREA B)



FINAL

October
2025





The Regional District of Nanaimo respectfully acknowledges that the lands that comprise Gabriola, Mudge and DeCourcy Islands and their surrounding waters lie within the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation since time immemorial.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of this Master Plan would not have been possible without the efforts of the following individuals and groups who contributed significant time, knowledge, and passion.

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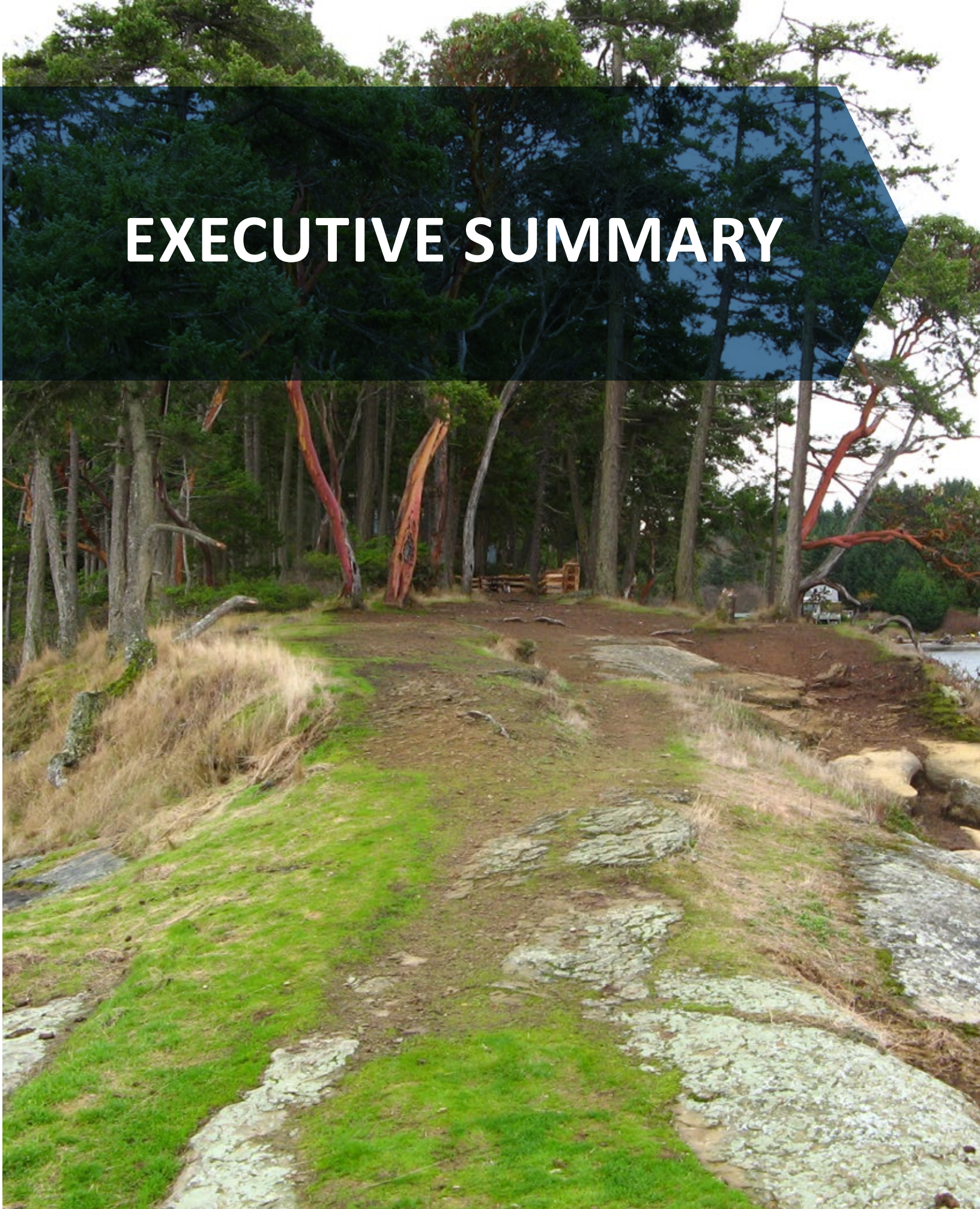
The Consulting Team

Led by RC Strategies with support from Binnie

And most importantly input from residents in Electoral Area B!

¹ A representative from Snuneymuxw First Nation participated in the initial committee meeting and contributed to early planning discussions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Project Context and Inputs

A Recreation and Parks Master Plan was developed to guide recreation services on Gabriola Island and community parks services across Electoral Area B, including Gabriola, Mudge and DeCourcy Islands over the next 10 years. The Master Plan will help ensure that priorities and resource allocation are based on strong rationale and geared towards maximizing resident benefit.

Development of the Master Plan contained herein included significant research and engagement to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the current state of recreation, key issues and topics, and other considerations that are important to consider when setting priorities (e.g. trends, emerging demands, ecological and environment considerations, resourcing, viability, etc.). The detailed findings from the research and engagement are contained in two background reports:

- » **“What We Heard” Summary Report (engagement findings)**
- » **Research Report (non-engagement research).**



Strategies and Goals

The future strategic direction recommended by the Master Plan includes 8 Strategies under which 19 Actions are organized. The Strategies and Actions collectively outline priority focus areas and tactics to address identified gaps, optimize service delivery, and ultimately maximize the benefits provided by public investment into recreation and parks services.

Strategies	Actions
RECREATION STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	
Strategy #1: Optimize recreation service delivery through continued collaboration and capacity development.	1A: Continue to partner with Gabriola Recreation Society and identify opportunities to support organizational capacity. 1B: Continue to monitor trends and emerging recreational opportunity demand.
Strategy #2: Explore the viability of developing a multi-purpose community centre on Gabriola Island.	2A: Undertake a feasibility study (multi-purpose community centre).
Strategy #3: Improve sport field experiences and opportunities.	3A: Investigate options to add more sports field capacity. 3B: Continue to work collaboratively to improve sport field bookings and allocations policies and practices.
Strategy #4: Increase resident access to aquatics opportunities.	4A: Consider formalizing an agreement with the private pool operator on Gabriola Island to secure increased public access. 4B: Explore opportunities to increase access to indoor aquatics facilities in Nanaimo for Gabriola Island residents. 4C: Explore opportunities to offer ocean-based aquatics programming. 4D: Revisit the viability of developing a pool facility in the long term.
PARKS AND TRAILS STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	
Strategy #5: Prioritize conservation and protection of high-value ecosystems and culturally sensitive sites.	5A: Work with Snuneymuxw First Nation, Islands Trust, and senior governments to identify and prioritize sensitive parks, trails, and water access areas for future planning and protection. 5B: Strengthen the conservation network through strategic land acquisitions.
Strategy #6: Formalize, expand, and enhance the network of water access sites.	6A: Undertake a Water Access Needs Assessment. 6B: Implement the Water Access Needs Assessment Recommendations.
Strategy #7: Optimize park experiences through planning and maintenance.	7A: Develop a new management plan for Cox Community Park. 7B: Update the existing 707 Community Park Management Plan. 7C: Identify priorities for park accessibility investments and initiatives. 7D: Evaluate maintenance and capital asset replacement requirements to ensure sufficient funding for a sustainable, well-maintained parks and trails system. 7E: Study dog management options and approaches for Gabriola Island.
Strategy #8: Secure, connect and diversify the trail network.	8A: Work towards creating a well-connected trail network that provides safe, direct routes between key destinations, with a focus on linking the ferry terminal and Drumbeg Provincial Park.



Next Steps and Implementation

Section 6 of the Master Plan provides an implementation plan with timeframes and estimated resource requirements. Implementation of the Master Plan's Strategies and Actions will occur over the next 10+ years based on available resourcing (financial and human). As with any publicly provided service, new and emerging issues continually arise and will need to be integrated into the Master Plan priorities and/or potentially require the Master Plan priorities to be revisited and refreshed.

As outlined throughout the Master Plan, the delivery of recreation and parks services and opportunities in Electoral Area B is highly collaborative and systems based. As such, implementation will be dependent on the RDN and other organizations involved in providing, facilitating, and supporting active living opportunities and infrastructure.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Master Plan Purpose and Future Use	1
1.2. Master Plan Process	2
1.3. Planning Alignment	3
2. Recreation and Parks in Electoral Area B	4
2.1. Recreation Services on Gabriola Island	4
2.2. Parks and Trails in Electoral Area B	8
2.3. Water Access Opportunities in Electoral Area B	11
3. Master Plan Engagement and Research Overview	14
3.1. Community Engagement	14
3.2. Research and Analysis	15
3.3. Project Background Documents	16
4. The Game Plan for Recreation on Gabriola Island	18
4.1. Summary of Identified Priorities and Needs for Recreation	18
4.2. Recreation Strategies and Actions	20



TABLE OF CONTENTS

5. The Game Plan for Parks and Trails in Electoral Area B	32
5.1. Summary of Identified Priorities for Parks and Trails . .	32
5.2. Parks and Trails Strategies and Actions	35
6. Implementation Plan	47
6.1. Implementation Overview and Tracking	47
6.2. Implementation Plan	48



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Master Plan Purpose and Future Use

This Recreation and Parks Master Plan has been developed to guide recreation services on Gabriola Island and community parks services across Electoral Area B, including Gabriola, Mudge and DeCourcy Islands over the next 10 years. The Master Plan provides a resource that will support decision-making and priority-setting, helping the RDN and its community partners in recreation and parks utilize and leverage available resources to achieve the greatest possible benefit to residents.

DEFINING RECREATION AND PARKS

The term “recreation” is broad and means different things to different people. The Framework for Recreation in Canada provides the following definition for recreation.

“Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative, and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.”

As per this definition, this Master Plan considers recreation to include sports, casual and “drop-in” types of recreation, arts and culture, and other leisure-based pursuits.

The term “parks” also represents a wide array of spaces. The parks system in Electoral Area B encompasses playgrounds, sports fields, sports courts, trails, conservation and natural areas, access to the water, and a host of other amenities and experiences. It is also important to note that the parks system in Electoral Area B includes Regional and Community parks managed by the RDN as well as provincial parks, School District 68 property, and lands managed by other entities.

For the purposes of the Master Plan, “trails” are defined as linear pathways that facilitate recreation and related leisure, active transportation and numerous other purposes, including walking, running, hiking, biking, and nature enjoyment. Trails also facilitate access to other recreation amenities, including parks, water access points, and community facilities. Recognizing that overlap exists in terms of use and amenity characteristics, the active transportation network (sidewalks, roadways, etc.) are not included within the scope of the Master Plan.

1.2. Master Plan Process

The Master Plan was initiated in June 2023 and finalized in June 2025. The graphic below summarizes the process used to develop the Master Plan. As illustrated, a program of research and engagement was undertaken to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the current state of recreation and parks. These learnings were used to inform the strategic direction contained in Sections 4 – 6 of the Master Plan. Additional information on the research and engagement tactics can be found in Section 3.

An Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from key partners, stakeholders, and interest groups in Electoral Area B was formed at the outset of the project. The Advisory Committee played an important role that included:

- » Reviewing project documents.
- » Supporting project engagement.
- » Identifying potential topics and issues that require further exploration and analysis.
- » Helping to interpret research findings.
- » Participating in (and providing input on) potential strategic directions and focus areas.

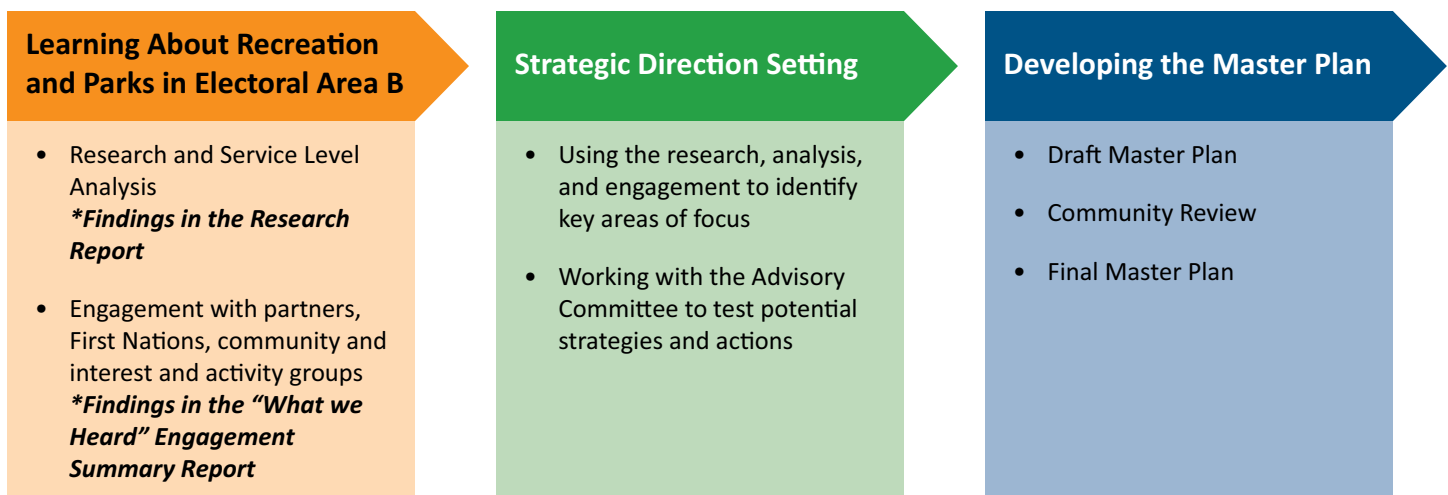


Figure 1 Master Plan Process Overview

1.3. Planning Alignment

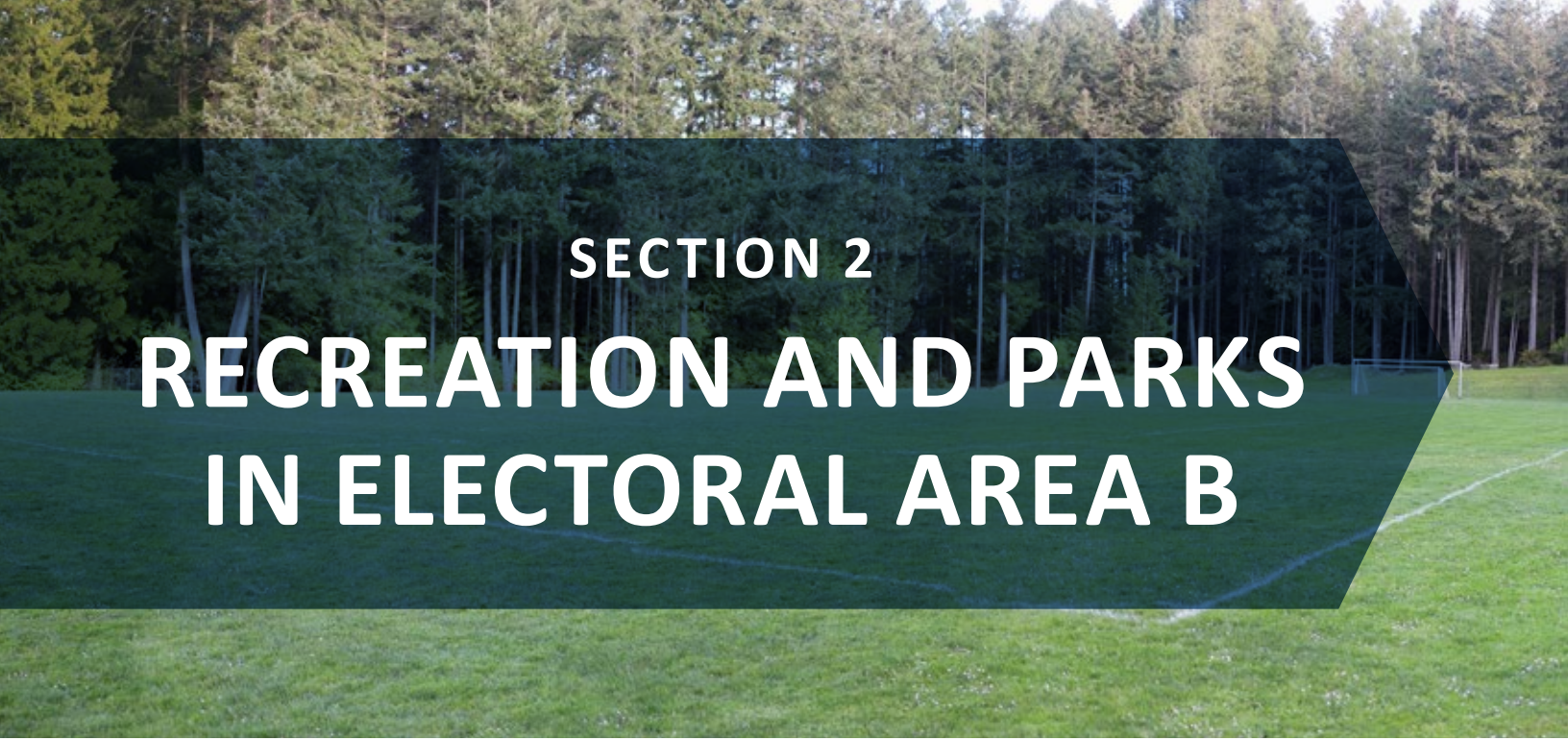
For a Master Plan to be effective, it needs to align (and where relevant, advance) other RDN and partner planning. Planning documents that were reviewed for areas of alignment include:

- » Official Community Plans (each Island has an OCP developed by the Islands Trust)
- » The RDN's Parks and Trails Strategy (2022)
- » Regional District of Nanaimo Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026
- » Islands Trust Draft Policy Statement (2023)
- » Islands Trust Conservancy – Regional Conservation Plan 2018 – 2027 (2018)
- » Existing Park Management Plans
- » Strategic planning, discussion papers, and reports developed by recreation partners in Electoral Area B, including the Gabriola Recreation Society, Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee (POSAC), and the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (GaLTT)

Note: The RDN Parks Biodiversity Plan was approved following the near-completion of this Master Plan. While it was not reviewed as a source document during the planning process, its future integration and alignment should be considered during implementation and future updates.

**Additional detail on many of the above documents can be found in the Research Report.*





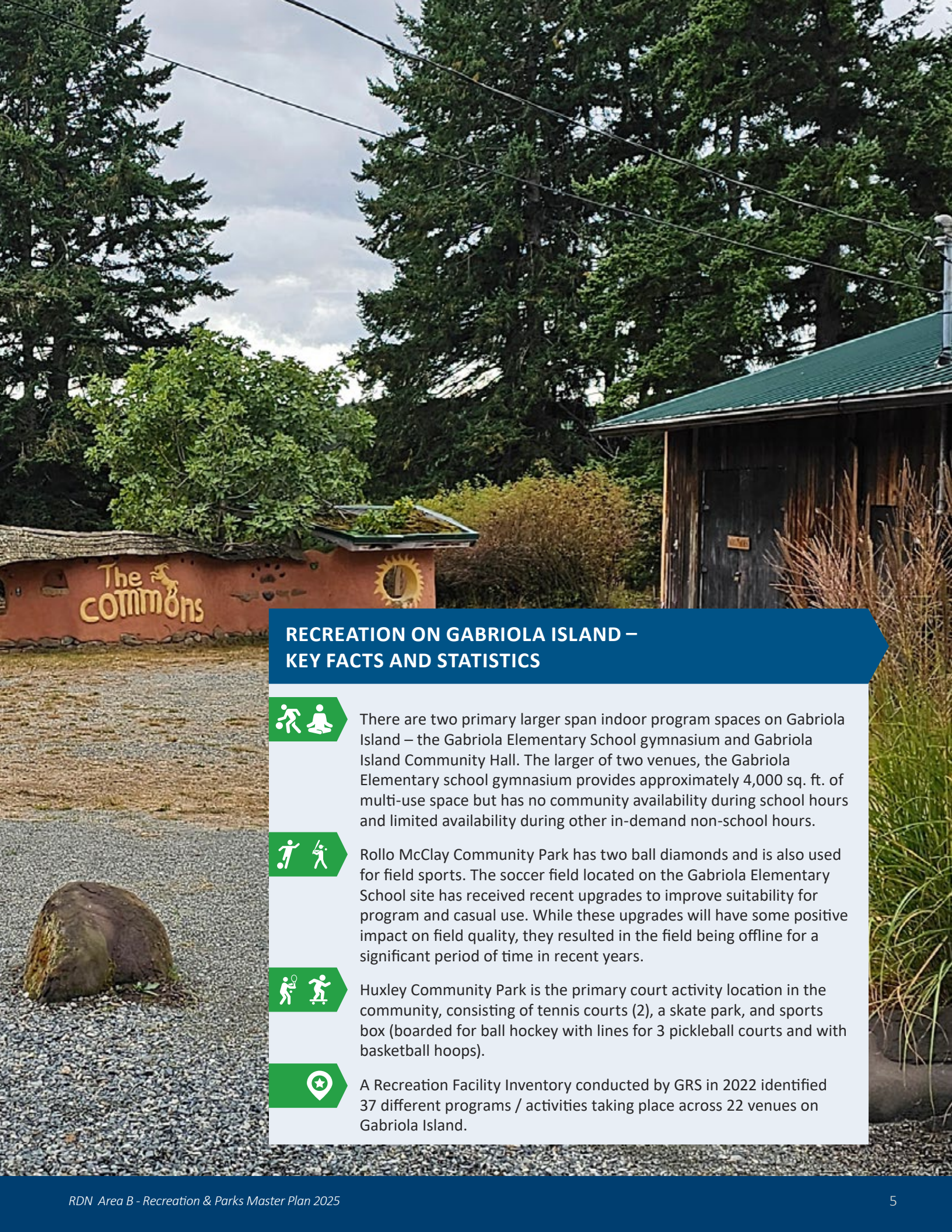
SECTION 2

RECREATION AND PARKS IN ELECTORAL AREA B

2.1. Recreation Services on Gabriola Island

The Gabriola Recreation Society (GRS) provides recreation programming to Gabriola Island residents through a service agreement with the RDN. As a registered non-profit organization, GRS is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors that oversees paid staff and contractors that plan and facilitate programming. The majority of GRS programming occurs in the Gabriola Elementary School gymnasium and the GRS office / classroom space in the school. The organization also utilizes space at the Gabriola Island Community Hall as well as outdoor park amenities. GRS additionally coordinates bookings for amenities at Huxley Community Park (tennis and sports courts) and Rollo McClay Community Park (sports fields) as per the service agreement with the RDN.

Several additional community groups and organizations also play a key role in providing recreation programming and activities, including sport organizations, private camps (including Camp Miriam which operates an outdoor pool that has previously been available for lessons provided by other organizations and community bookings), the Gabriola Island Community Hall Association, the Rollo Seniors Centre and GaLTT.



RECREATION ON GABRIOLA ISLAND – KEY FACTS AND STATISTICS



There are two primary larger span indoor program spaces on Gabriola Island – the Gabriola Elementary School gymnasium and Gabriola Island Community Hall. The larger of two venues, the Gabriola Elementary school gymnasium provides approximately 4,000 sq. ft. of multi-use space but has no community availability during school hours and limited availability during other in-demand non-school hours.



Rollo McClay Community Park has two ball diamonds and is also used for field sports. The soccer field located on the Gabriola Elementary School site has received recent upgrades to improve suitability for program and casual use. While these upgrades will have some positive impact on field quality, they resulted in the field being offline for a significant period of time in recent years.



Huxley Community Park is the primary court activity location in the community, consisting of tennis courts (2), a skate park, and sports box (boarded for ball hockey with lines for 3 pickleball courts and with basketball hoops).



A Recreation Facility Inventory conducted by GRS in 2022 identified 37 different programs / activities taking place across 22 venues on Gabriola Island.

It is also important to note that recreation activities take place across a wide array of spaces and places operated by several entities. The following graphic and map (Figure 2 and Figure 3) provide an overview of the broader inventory of recreation facilities and amenities that facilitate these activities.

Overview of Recreation Infrastructure on Gabriola Island

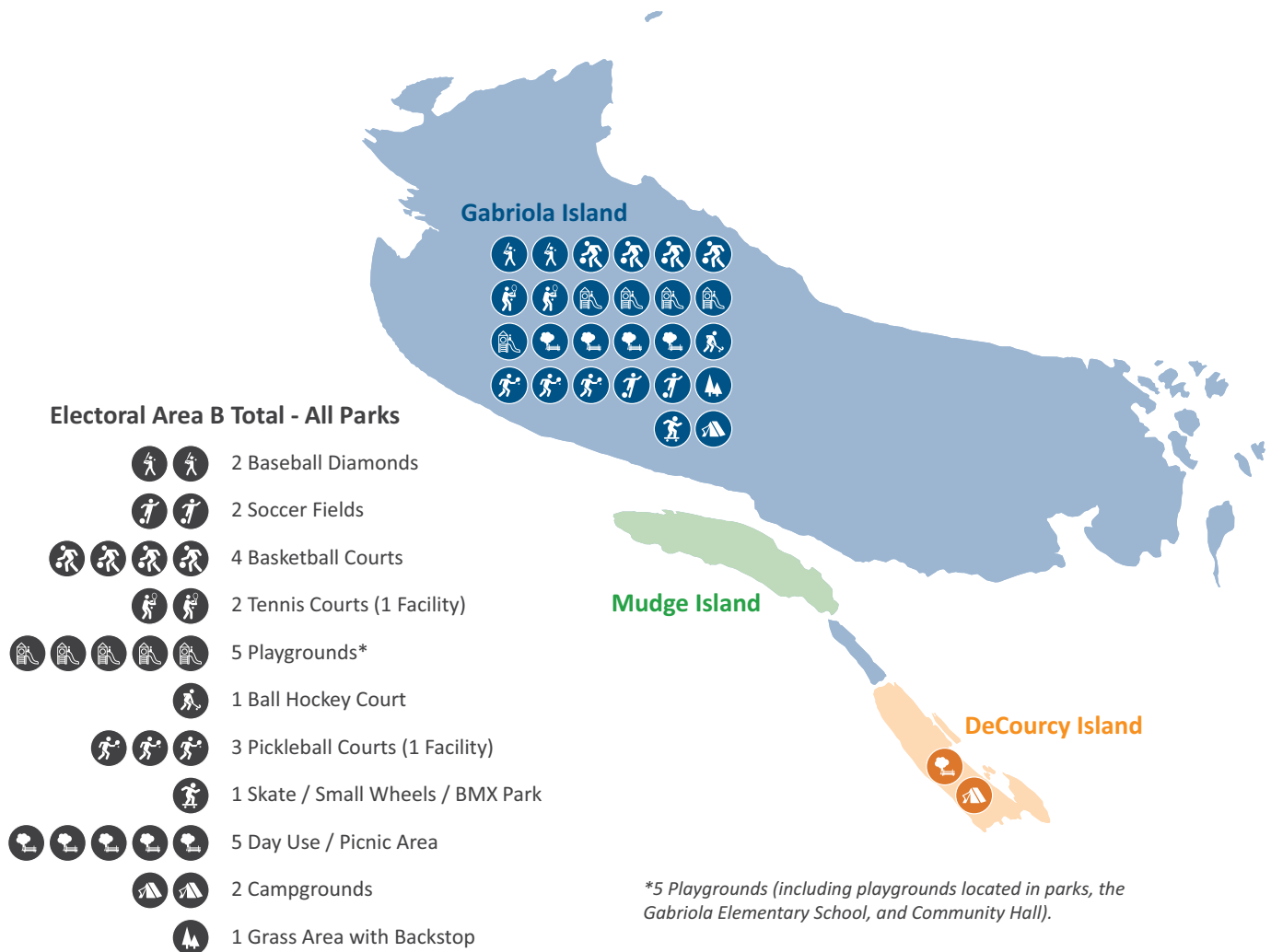


Figure 2 Supply of Recreation Infrastructure

Location of Recreation Amenities on Gabriola Island

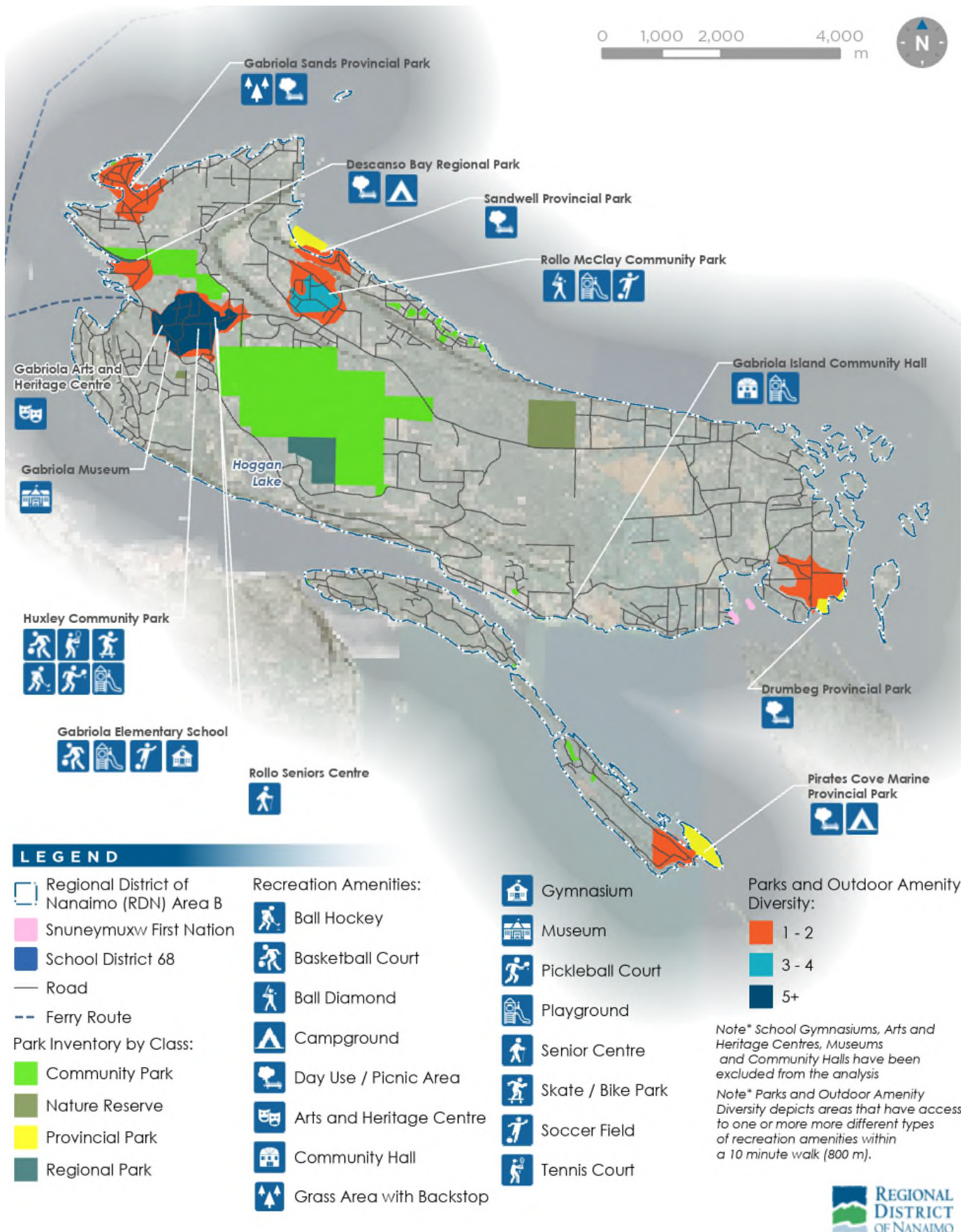


Figure 3 Recreation Amenities Overview Map

2.2. Parks and Trails in Electoral Area B

The system of parks, trails and water access points in Electoral Area B is complex and managed by numerous entities. Additionally, many of these spaces and amenities provide access to the ocean which is under the jurisdiction of the federal government through Fisheries and Oceans Canada.¹

The RDN's provision of nature based, outdoor recreation includes:

- » 2 Regional Parks (Descanso Bay Regional Park and Coats Marsh Regional Park)
- » 27 Community Parks

In total, RDN's combined Regional and Community parks systems comprises approximately 600 ha which represents 78% of the total parks and conservation network. Notably, 707 Community Park at 458 ha accounts for 76% of the RDN's total park space in Electoral Area B and 59% of the total parks and conservation site network.

Within Electoral Area B there are approximately 89 km of mapped (identified) trails, of which approximately 67% are considered sanctioned trails (60.2 km). Notably, 15.5 km of the trails network is sanctioned through trail license agreements with a private landowner and managed by GaLTT. The supply of unsanctioned trails (29.2 km, 33% of the total known trails inventory) is significant and these trails have no formal approval, license, or landowner permit. Gabriola Island contains 99.6% of total mapped trails in Electoral Area B, with approximately one-third of mapped trails (28 km) existing within one park site – 707 Community Park.

For additional detail and analysis on the parks, trails, and conservation system in Electoral Area B please refer to Sections 4 and 5 of the Research Report.

PARK PROVISION BY ISLAND



- » There are 30 park and conservation sites on **Gabriola Island** (all types) for a total of 693.4 ha. 12% of Gabriola Island's total land base is contained within parks and conservation areas and 89% of Electoral Area B's park and conservation space is located on Gabriola Island. *
- » There are 4 park and conservation sites on **DeCourcy Island** (all types) for a total of 26.5 ha. 13% of DeCourcy Island's total land base is contained within parks and conservation areas and 4% of Electoral Area B's park space and conservation space is located on DeCourcy Island.
- » **Mudge Island** contains 2 park and conservation sites (all types) for a total of 0.5 ha. 0.2% of Mudge Island's land is contained within parks and conservation areas representing 0.1% of Electoral Area B's park and conservation space.
- » 2 additional park and conservation area (Land Trust) sites are located on Link and Saturnina Islands.

Notes:

*Totals for park and conservation areas exclude water access sites

Figures do not include five privately-owned properties protected through covenants ()

¹ Fisheries and Oceans Canada also have specific management responsibility for 5 marine rockfish conservation areas within RDN EA B.

Functionally, the trails network in Electoral Area B can be grouped into four use-based categories as per the table below.

Table 1. Functional Trail Typologies Overview

Type	Characteristics	Examples
Looped Network	Longer natural surfaced or graveled trails organized into a higher density of interconnected trail loops and supporting a variety of recreational activities.	» 707 Community Park network » Cox Community Park & Descanso Bay Regional Park networks
Shoreline & Viewpoint Access	Short, linear, natural surfaced or graveled trails to a shoreline access and / or coastal viewpoint.	» Decourcy Drive Water Access Trails » Malaspina Galleries Community Park
Active Transportation	Wide, hard / compacted surface, linear trail providing convenient connection between major destinations.	» Village Way Path
Connectors	Short linear trails whose purpose is to provide physical connections between roads or adjacent neighbourhoods.	» Burnside Drive Community Trail » Petroglyph Community Trail » Dunlop Flewett Community Trail



The following table further categorizes the trail inventory by landowner. As reflected in the table, approximately half of the trails inventory is formally protected through inclusion in a dedicated parks system (RDN parks and trails system or provincial park). While public access to other trails is secured through mechanisms like agreements with private landowners (managed by GaLTT) or trails through Crown land, these situations are generally less permanent.

Table 2. Trail Provision by Landowner

Landowner	Land Classification	Trail Length (km)	Proportion of Total Trail Length in the System
Regional District of Nanaimo	Community Trail	3.4	3.8%
Regional District of Nanaimo	Community Parks	36.1	40.4%
Regional District of Nanaimo	Regional Parks	3.6	4%
Province of British Columbia (BC Parks)	Provincial Parks	1.6	1.8%
Province of British Columbia (MWLRS)	Vacant Crown Lands	6.6	7.4%
Province of British Columbia (MoTT)	Undeveloped Road Allowances	2.8	3.1%
Government of Canada	Federal Crown Lands	19.8	22.2%
Private Landowners	Managed by GaLTT	15.5	17.3%
Total		89.4 km	100%



2.3. Water Access Opportunities in Electoral Area B

Access to the ocean is especially important within the Electoral Area B context – both for recreational and practical transportation purposes. It is also critical to recognize the significant importance that foreshores and intertidal zones have on ocean ecology as well as the cultural significance they hold for First Nations.

A preliminary, high-level inventory of water access points was undertaken at the outset of the Master Plan process. This exercise was intended to help the project team gain a general understanding of key inventory characteristics, issues, and typologies.

Table 3 and Figure 4 reflect sites identified through the site visits and various GIS databases but may not capture every formal or informal site that exists – as per Action 6A in Section 5 additional inventory and analysis of the water access system is recommended.

KEY WATER ACCESS STATISTICS AND PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS



There is 68 km of total shoreline amongst the Electoral Area B islands. 79.4% of this shoreline is on Gabriola Island.



79% of Electoral Area B's shoreline is privately owned.



Of the remaining 21% that is not privately owned, only 10% exists within a public park (the majority of the remaining lands are within MoTT road rights-of-way designations).



BC Ferries services Gabriola Island from its terminal in downtown Nanaimo. DeCourcy and Mudge Island do not have ferry service – residents are required to utilize private crafts or private water taxi services to travel from those respective islands to Vancouver Island or other Gulf Islands.



As previously noted, the overall provision of water access sites serves both recreation and transportation purposes (private and commercial). The sites identified through the inventory include those located in formal parks that primarily service recreational activities as well as those managed by other RDN departments, private operators, and senior levels of government with a wide array of service delivery mandates.

For additional detail on water access sites, including distribution, types and ownership, and other key characteristics and attributes, please refer to Section 6 of the Research Report.

Table 3. Preliminary Inventory of Water Access Sites by Manager

Manager	Formal Hand Launch Sites	Informal Hand Launch Sites	Formal - Powerboat Launch, Moorage, Wharf Sites	Informal - Powerboat Launch, Moorage, Wharf Sites	Undeveloped MoTT Right of Way	TOTAL
Regional District of Nanaimo	15	1	2	0	0	18
Provincial Crown – MoTT	5	34	0	4	61	104
Provincial Crown – BC Parks	5	0	2	0	0	7
Federal government (Degnen Bay, Formal Powerboat Launch / Moorage / Wharf)	0	0	1	0	0	1
Private / Non-Profit Organizations	0	1	4	0	0	5
TOTAL	25	36	9	4	61	135

**El Verano is counted as a powerboat launch site under the Regional District of Nanaimo; however, only the parking lot is officially managed by RDN Parks under a permit with MoTT. While there is no formal boat launch infrastructure, the site is informally used for trailer launching boats.*



Overview of Identified Water Access Points (Preliminary)

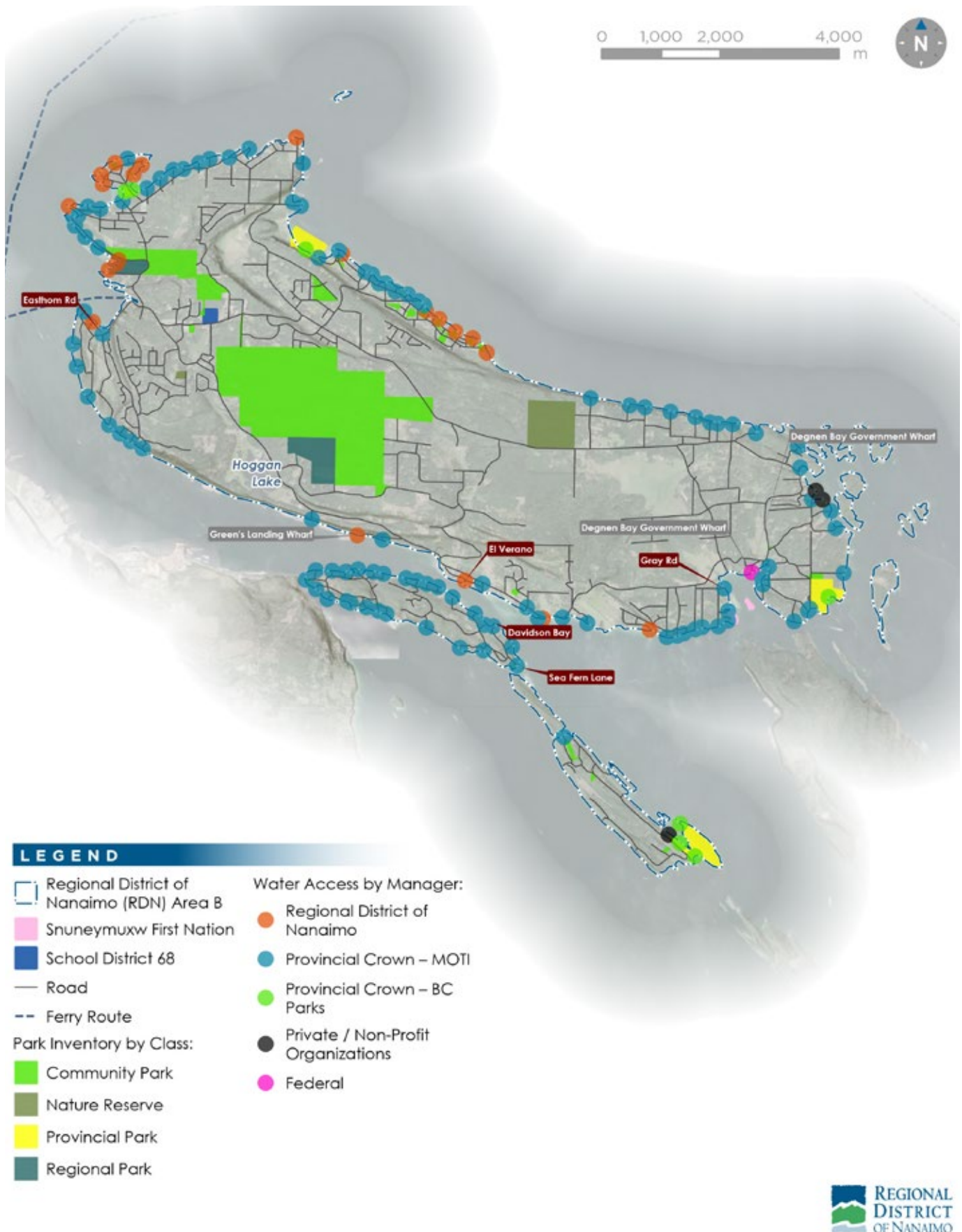


Figure 4 Water Access Points Map

PLEASE IDENTIFY SPECIFIC RECREATION AMENITIES OR PARKS SPACES ON THE MAP THAT SHOULD BE PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT, EXPANSION, OR ADDITION.

SECTION 3 MASTER PLAN ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH OVERVIEW

3.1. Community Engagement

Engagement with Electoral Area B residents, First Nations representatives, community organizations and interest groups was a key component in developing the Master Plan. Through these engagements, the project team was able to explore a number of important topics, including:

- » Activity preferences and trends
- » Satisfaction levels with current opportunities and services
- » Perspectives on potential priorities and focus areas for infrastructure and programming and nature conservation
- » Priority setting considerations

Several different engagement methods were used to ensure that a broad range of perspectives from individuals with diverse activity interests and demographic characteristics. Most of the community engagement took place during the summer and fall of 2023.

Engagement Methods and Responses Overview



HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (CODED ACCESS)

285 responses



HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (OPEN ACCESS, NON-CODED VERSION)

231 responses



COMMUNITY INTEREST GROUP DISCUSSIONS & DIALOGUE

21 groups / activity interests
participated



SOUNDING BOARDS

40 comments provided



OPEN HOUSE

Approximately 30 attendees

3.2. Research and Analysis

The project team also undertook comprehensive research and analysis to complement the community engagement and further explore key attributes of the current recreation and park and trails system and identify factors that will influence future priorities. The graphic below summarizes the research and analysis methods that were used.



**INVENTORY OF
AMENITIES AND
SPACES**



BENCHMARKING



SPATIAL ANALYSIS



**TRENDS AND BEST
PRACTICES REVIEW**



**POPULATION AND
DEMOGRAPHICS
ANALYSIS**



**FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENTS
OF THE PARKS AND
TRAILS SYSTEM**



**REVIEW OF PREVIOUS
PLANNING AND
EXISTING POLICY
DIRECTIONS**



**REVIEW OF SERVICE
DELIVERY CHARACTERISTICS
AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

3.3. Project Background Documents

The detailed findings from the engagement and research components of this project are compiled in two standalone background documents – the “What We Heard” Summary Report (engagement findings) and Research Report (non-engagement research). Combined, these two reports contain over 200 pages of data and analysis that informed the key strategic direction contained in Sections 4 and 5 of this Master Plan – **please refer to these reports to review the detailed engagement and research findings.**

[Both background reports can be accessed through the RDN website.](#)



THE GAME PLANS

The following two sections of the Master Plan identify future priorities for recreation services on Gabriola Island (Section 4) and parks and trails throughout Electoral Area B (Section 5). The strategic direction provided in these two sections are organized into Strategies and Actions.



Strategies: The overarching recommended direction aimed at focusing investment on key priorities and achieving desired outcomes.



Actions: Each Strategy has one or more Action(s) that reflect more specific, tactical, and tangible / implementable approaches to achieving the overall Strategy direction.

SECTION 4

THE GAME PLAN FOR RECREATION ON GABRIOLA ISLAND

4.1. Summary of Identified Priorities and Needs for Recreation

The Strategies and Actions contained in this section (4.2.) were identified based on engagement and research that highlighted several key focus and priority areas. The following table summarizes these identified priorities along with corresponding rationale from the engagement and research.

Table 4. Key Findings from the Recreation Service Level Assessment

Community priorities	Identified through the Engagement	Identified through the Research	Key Findings, Rationale and Planning Considerations
Increased multi-use program space.	✓	✓	» Access to indoor multi-use programming space is limited, with GRS having some use of the small gymnasium and other spaces at Gabriola Elementary School. » The Gabriola Community Hall is a valued and well utilized space but is not large enough to accommodate many activities (e.g. adult recreational sports). Functionality for some recreational and active use programming and overall availability also presents challenges for ongoing program use. » Activity trends in recreation are dynamic and continually evolving. Large span program rooms and gymnasium type spaces are among the most adaptable types of amenity spaces that can evolve with trends and serve multiple program-based and drop-in uses. » 48% of Resident Survey respondents (Gabriola residents) indicated that they regularly travel to meet needs for social activities. » The benefits of having a community hub that can accommodate programming and social gathering was a consistent theme identified through the engagement.

Community priorities	Identified through the Engagement	Identified through the Research	Key Findings, Rationale and Planning Considerations
Increased fitness and wellness activities and opportunities.	✓	✓	» 23% of Resident Survey respondents (Gabriola Island residents) identified fitness / wellness facilities as a space that should be a priority for investment (second highest among all indoor space types). » There is not currently a publicly operated fitness centre on Gabriola Island. » Indoor programming space and time availability for fitness classes is limited. » Fitness trends and preferences are continually evolving, impacting the ability of many smaller private sector operators to achieve sustainability.
Enhanced and expanded arts and cultural program spaces.	✓		» 22% of Resident Survey respondents identified a performing arts theatre as a priority for investment. » The importance of arts and culture to the fabric of Gabriola Island was a key theme expressed through the community engagement.
Improved sports fields	✓	✓	» The current supply of quality fields and diamonds on Gabriola Island is limited. Issues with field quality were commonly expressed during the community engagement. » Closures of sport fields on Gabriola Island (school field and Rollo McClay fields) to undertake field improvements have further impacted supply and programming in recent years. » Minor soccer remains popular locally, regionally, provincially, and nationally. » Sports fields provide flexible, multi-use spaces that are easily able to adapt as trends and activity demands change. These surfaces also meet needs for both structured programs and league play as well as unstructured (casual) uses.
Opportunities across all age cohorts to be physically and socially active.	✓	✓	» The population characteristics of Gabriola Island are unique. » Available public health data reflects that there are increasing needs for positive social and physical activities that can improve mental health, create more connection with community, and reduce chronic disease. » Growth projections suggest that Gabriola Island will add approximately 2,000 residents over the next 20 years across multiple age and demographic cohorts.¹

¹ BC Stats Population Growth Projections

4.2. Recreation Strategies and Actions

Strategy #1: Optimize recreation service delivery through continued collaboration and capacity development.

Action 1A: Continue to partner with Gabriola Recreation Society and identify opportunities to support organizational capacity.

GRS has been successful at providing recreation services on Gabriola Island. Findings from the community engagement indicate that resident satisfaction levels are relatively strong (58% of Resident Survey respondents indicated a level of satisfaction; only 6% indicated a level of dissatisfaction).

Over the next decade, GRS will need to continue evolving, adapting and optimizing to meet continually dynamic activity and programming needs. The RDN can support GRS in meeting its mandate by providing guidance and additional capacity building resources, including:

- » Staff and volunteer training opportunities
- » Connections to sector best practice resources
- » Program staff and contracted instructor contacts (e.g. for specialized and trending activity skill sets)

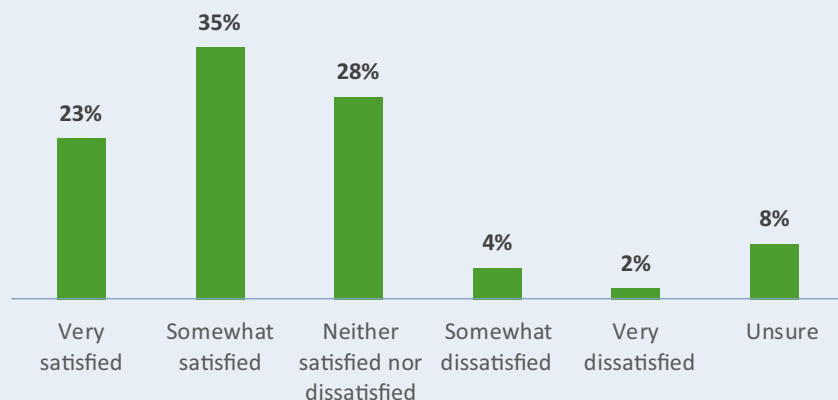
It will also be important for the GRS Board and RDN (as the service agreement holder) to recognize that successful program provision requires the ability to be creative and flexible. Success metrics for programming should not only be total participants, but also include indicators such as:

- » Number of new participants engaged
- » Dispersion of programming across a multitude of age cohorts
- » Program alignment with Long Term Development (Sport for Life)
- » Program delivery to equity deserving groups

RESIDENT SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS

Gabriola Island Respondents

Satisfaction with the Recreation Programs Offered



GRS already considers many of the above indicators and participant types when designing programming. However, opportunities exist to improve data collection to better measure impacts and ensure future programming decisions are informed by an accurate understanding of trends, demands, and other indicators that can help ensure programming is best aligned to provide maximum community benefit.

As new activities trend and program demands emerge, GRS will also be required to determine the types of programming that it should allocate resources towards. The following tool can be used to help GRS determine which types of programming it should provide and could also be used (or adjusted) to audit and evaluate current programming.

Table 5. Primary Decision-Making Criteria

Application: A potential program (or program type) needs to meet all these initial key screening criteria to be considered by GRS		
Criteria	Description	Potential Measurement Tactics & Approaches
Safety and Risk Management	The potential program is safe and potential risks can be reasonably mitigated.	» Cross-reference how the program would fit into existing safety practices and protocols. » Identification of specific program / activity risks and whether suitable mitigation strategies exist. » Sufficient risk management practices can be put in place (e.g. police checks, fits within GRS insurance, etc.).
Mandate Alignment	The potential program fits within GRS's service mandate.	» Review of core mandate and guiding principles.
Equity and Accessibility	Recognizing that programming will have different levels of accessibility, the program is deemed to be appropriate and doesn't unfairly exclude participants based on race, gender, or sexual orientation.	» Review of program specific accessibility and level of appropriateness. » Engage subject matter expertise to advise as necessary.



Table 6. Secondary Decision-Making Criteria

Application: If a potential program meets all of the above Primary criteria, it should be further evaluated using the following set of important considerations. Programs that align with most of these secondary criteria have sufficient rationale for GRS provision.		
Criteria	Description	Level of Importance
Impacts on Existing Programs	The potential program will not impact the ability of GRS to deliver existing high value programs (e.g. displace existing programs, require resources to be diverted, etc.)	High
Suitable Program Delivery Personnel	GRS is able to procure a qualified instructor who can deliver the potential program in a space and quality manner (with appropriate certification and best practice alignment).	High
Alignment with Best Practice in Recreation Programming	The program type aligns with best practice (e.g. by helping to advance physical literacy amongst key age cohorts, provides opportunities for different ages or life experiences to interact, etc.)	High
Complementary to Other Programs	The program complements other programming offered by GRS and other providers.	Moderate
Demand and Sustainability	GRS should be enabled/empowered to pilot programs and take advantage of opportunities that arise to test out new and innovative types of programming. However, some consideration should be given to long-term demand especially when investment may be needed (e.g. new equipment, instructor training, etc.)	Moderate / Low

There are also times when existing programs may warrant consideration for “retirement”. If a program can no longer be provided in a safe and quality manner, that program should be immediately discontinued. Additionally, if 2 or more of the following conditions are met it is recommended that GRS consider discontinuation of a program.

- » Program participation has decreased by a significant amount over the past 3 seasons/sessions.
- » Potential higher value uses of instructor or staff time have been identified.
- » Suitable space is no longer available.

Action 1B: Continue to monitor trends and emerging recreational opportunity demand.

Recreation interests and preferences are dynamic and continually evolving. In addition to the specific initiatives outlined in Action 4A-C it will be important for the RDN and its partners to continue monitoring local and regional trends and changes in activity participation, program and spaces demands, and the use/uses of existing indoor and outdoor spaces. Identified below are several recommended tactics and approaches that should be considered to ensure an ongoing and up-to-date understanding of the recreation landscape on Gabriola Island.

It is important to note that some of these actions are already occurring and are simply being identified to re-embed these practices.

- » Continued collection and analysis of GRS program data.
- » Monitoring of growing activities like pickleball to identify potential future court supply needs.
- » Regular inventory of community groups.
- » Better understanding of spontaneous use of courts, playgrounds, and other amenities using tactics such as spot counts, counters, and other newer data tools (e.g. purchase of movement data).

Having access to data on trends and activity preferences will help inform future planning and resource allocation across recreation and parks functions as well as support monthly and annual program planning.



Strategy #2: Explore the viability of developing a multi-purpose community centre on Gabriola Island.

Action 2A: Undertake a feasibility study.

The lack of large span, flexible, and regularly available indoor space on Gabriola Island is a challenge for all providers of recreation, leisure, and community programming. While the benefits and needs rationale for a new multi-purpose community centre type facility on Gabriola Island is strong, further exploration of the cost impacts, viability, and resourcing options is required.

It is recommended that a feasibility study be undertaken to comprehensively explore:

- » Facility program and amenity configurations (main components and support for amenity options)
- » Capital costs
- » Operating costs
- » Site options
- » Ownership, governance, management, and operating models
- » Funding and resourcing approaches

As a starting point, the feasibility study should consider the following core facility program components that have been identified through the Master Plan process.

- » Large span space (gymnasium)
- » Space that can offer fitness opportunities (further exploration should be undertaken to determine if this space is best geared towards fitness equipment and/or programming)
- » Multi-purpose program rooms
- » Social space

Opportunities to expand arts and culture space and programming capacity should also be explored as part of this potential project – either through opportunities for multi-use (e.g. gymnasium that can accommodate performances, program rooms suitable for arts classes, etc.) or the potential consideration of some dedicated amenities and spaces (e.g. pottery and other maker spaces, spaces that can accommodate performing arts, etc.).



Site options and requirements will be a particularly important aspect of the recommended feasibility study, given the limited land supply on Gabriola Island. Table 7 outlines some key factors that will need to be explored and analyzed that could impact the facility program (spaces and amenities) and overall project viability).

Table 7. Potential Community Centre Development – Key Factors and Considerations

Key Factor	Importance (Impact on Viability)	Considerations
Footprint Requirements	High	» Existence of land with the viability to be serviced that can accommodate the desired facility footprint (if a land parcel is not available to accommodate the desired amenities and spaces, further prioritization of spaces may be required). » Ecological value of the land and risks associated with development.
Land Use Priorities	High	» Best use relative to other identified capital projects (does a community centre provide the greatest benefit and value to the community?).
Accessibility and Co-Location Opportunities	Medium - High	» Accessibility of the site via active and motorized modes of transportation. » Opportunities to co-locate with other indoor and/or outdoor spaces.



Strategy #3: Improve sport field experiences and opportunities.

Action 3A: Investigate options to add more sports field capacity.

Meeting the long-term needs of soccer, spontaneous use / play, and emerging rectangular field activities will require additional capacity beyond what currently exists. This additional capacity is required to meet the needs of programming and spontaneous use, both current and future (as the population on Gabriola Island grows). Three tactics are recommended for future exploration.

- » Investigate a license of use / joint use agreement with School District 68 that secures sustainable and suitable hours for community use at the sports field located behind Gabriola Elementary School.
- » Continue to investigate options to improve the surface quality of the fields at Rollo McClay Community Park and make them more suitable for a wider array of activity types. **A small gravel surface field has recently been developed to improve rainy season capacity and access.*
- » Investigate site options and the viability of developing new sports field(s).

The third of the above three options (new field development) should be explored after more clarity exists on the first two (increased access to school fields and investigation of enhancements to Rollo McClay Community Park). Field quality and reliability of access (field playability) at both the Gabriola Elementary School field and Rollo McClay Community Park fields have been identified as an issue. The RDN has taken steps to explore potential solutions at Rollo McClay (including retaining technical expertise to further explore drainage and turf issues and the development of a gravel surface field as noted above) and it is recommended that these efforts continue; however, the lack of water supply at Rollo McClay Community Park presents a significant issue with maintaining turf quality and could ultimately limit the probability of maintaining these fields at a higher quality level.

The option of installing lower maintenance sport field surfaces at Rollo McClay Community Park or a potential new sports field site could help address field quality issues, especially during rainy and hot seasons. However, the two lower maintenance surface options – gravel and artificial turf – both have challenges that could limit viability.

Artificial sport fields are highly desired by many types of sport field user groups due to the consistency of surface quality and accessibility (e.g. playable during all seasons without risk of damaging fields). In general, an artificial turf field provides 3 – 5 times the functional playing time capacity of a natural surface field. However, artificial turf fields are significantly more expensive than other surface types with a relatively short lifespan of typically 10 – 12 years. Due to these capital cost factors, many jurisdictions need to levy fees that can fund replacement. While available literature supports that artificial sports fields are safe to human health and the environment, the ecologically sensitive landscape of Gabriola Island may require additional mitigation strategies that could limit site options and increase cost.



If the development of a new sport field site is pursued, several additional key factors will require further exploration and consideration as outlined in Table 8.

Table 8. Potential Sport Field Development – Key Factors and Considerations

Key Factor	Importance (Impact on Viability)	Considerations
Land Supply Suitability	High	» Existence of a land parcel that is suitable for, at minimum, one full sized sports field with adequate amenities (as per a test fit exercise). » Ecological value of the land and risks associated with development. » Access to a water supply (irrigation or alternative) to support field quality and effective maintenance practices.
Land Use Priorities	High	» Best use relative to other identified capital projects (does a sport field provide the greatest benefit and value to the community?).
Accessibility and Co-Location Opportunities	Medium - High	» Accessibility of the site via active and motorized modes of transportation. » Opportunities to co-locate with other indoor or outdoor recreation and/or community amenities that can share support amenities, create operational synergies, etc.

Action 3B: Continue to work collaboratively to improve sport field bookings and allocations policies and practices.

Having sound policy direction in place will ensure that sport field use is equitable and balances the needs of program-based use with sustaining field quality. Suggested key elements of a new policy should include:

- » Field use guidelines that outline when fields are permittable for bookable use.
- » Clear guidelines for when fields will be closed based on weather conditions and maintenance.
- » Equitable allocation guidelines that provide access to both tenured and new groups.

The new policy will help manage existing fields as well as new field capacity that could come online in the future (e.g. school field and/or new field development).

The RDN and GRS (booker of the Rollo McClay Community Park fields) are currently working on developing a refreshed allocations approach using the recommended key elements contained under this action.

Strategy #4: Increase resident access to aquatics opportunities.

Action 4A: Consider formalizing an agreement with the private pool operator on Gabriola Island to secure increased public access.

Camp Miriam on Gabriola Island has an outdoor pool that is available for rental and has offered some limited public lessons and programming in the past. Formalizing an agreement with the camp operator (Habonim Dror Camp Miriam), if possible, offers an opportunity to expand aquatics lessons and fitness programming on Gabriola Island. It is recommended that the RDN work with GRS to explore the viability and costs of formalizing an ongoing use agreement.

Action 4B: Explore opportunities to increase access to indoor aquatics facilities in Nanaimo for Gabriola Island residents.

Based on average drive and ferry wait times, the average commute to the nearest indoor aquatics facility (Nanaimo Aquatics Centre) is approximately 40 - 50 minutes for most residents on Gabriola Island (see Figure 5). This commute presents barriers for many residents who don't have a private vehicle or face financial challenges that impact their ability to pay for transportation, admission fees, and transportation costs (including ferry service), etc. Although it may not be possible to mitigate all of these barriers, it is recommended that the RDN, GRS, and other local service organizations prioritize finding creative ways to enable more affordable access to indoor aquatics facilities in Nanaimo.

Potential options that could be explored include:

- » Set, weekly aquatics bus / van shuttles
- » Working with BC Ferries and RDN Transit to offset costs and promote / coordinate aquatics trips.
- » Subsidizing admissions and passes for Gabriola Island residents at City of Nanaimo aquatics facilities.

It is also important to note that Electoral Area B is part of the funding service area for pools, arenas, and other recreation amenities and services in Nanaimo. As such, increasing access to these amenities supports use by residents that contribute to them.



Current Access to Nanaimo for Indoor Swimming

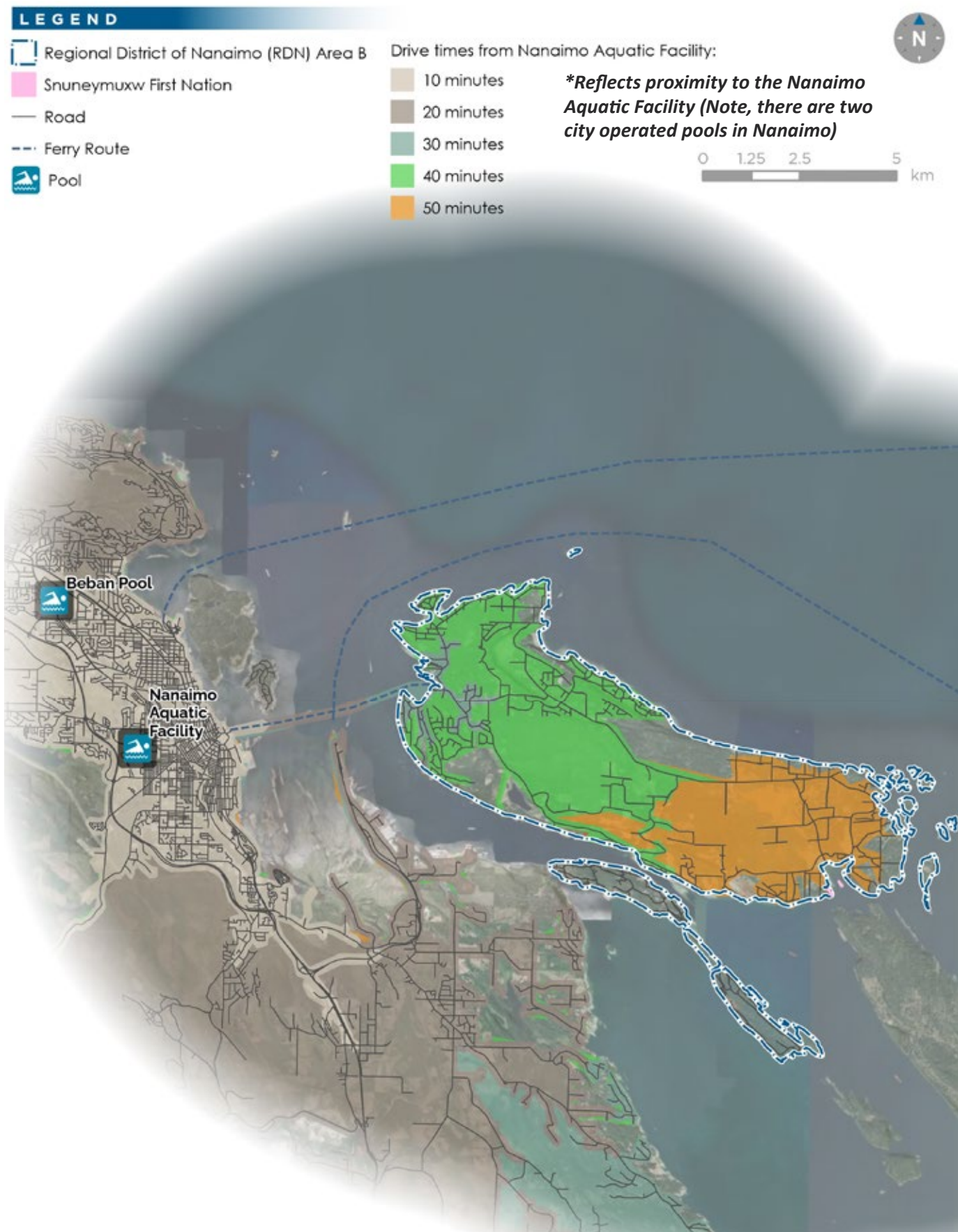
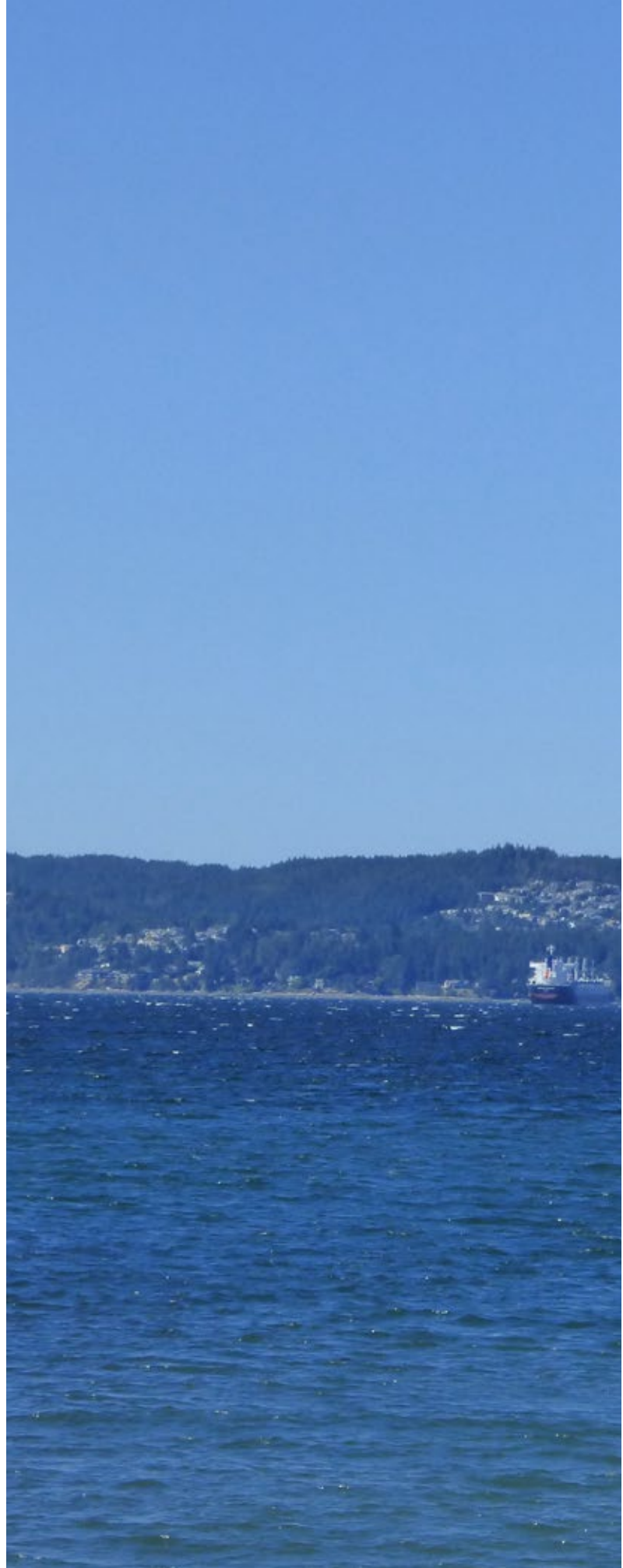


Figure 5 Current Access to Nanaimo for Indoor Swimming

Action 4C: Explore opportunities to offer ocean-based aquatics programming.

Having the necessary skills and level of comfort with ocean based, open water environments should be an aspirational, baseline level of water education for Gabriola Island residents – especially children and youth. Opportunities to offer increased open water education focused aquatics programming (including swim lessons, introductory kayaking programs, etc.) should be explored and are likely to require further dialogue on the best provision and funding approaches to meet this identified opportunity. Additionally, identifying and communicating to residents and visitors the locations that are suitable for ocean-based swimming can help promote safety, education, and participation.



Action 4D: Revisit the viability of developing a pool facility in the long term.

Gabriola Island residents have a strong desire for an aquatics facility to be developed. The geographic context of Gabriola Island elevates the importance of water safety education and overall desire to participate in aquatics-based experiences. However, the cost of building and operating an aquatics facility is extremely challenging for most communities under 20,000 residents. Cost escalation has resulted in the construction (capital) costs for a small to medium sized indoor pool ranging from \$30,000,000 - \$70,000,000 (2025 dollars; based on recent projects in BC) with annual operating costs exceeding one million dollars. Additional challenges include; water supply scarcity, staffing difficulties (finding qualified lifeguards and instructors), and limited land availability.

While an indoor pool on Gabriola Island would be highly valued and beneficial, it is likely beyond the financial capacity of the current tax base to fund the amenity.

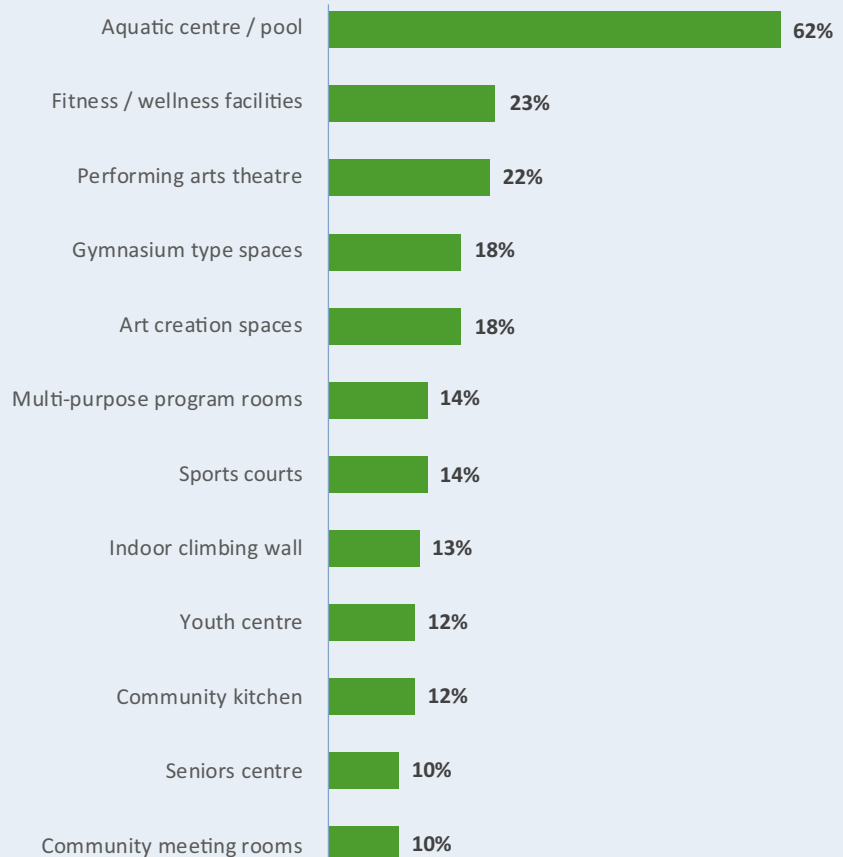
The previous Actions (4A - 4C) identify potential tactics to address aquatics demand – while none of these approaches will compensate for not having a pool locally, they can help increase aquatics access and opportunities.

The potential for a publicly provided pool on Gabriola Island should be revisited again in the future (8-10+ years). If sufficient rationale exists, the RDN and its local partners could explore costs, scale / type, sites, and operational approaches through a feasibility study. As an alternative to an indoor pool, the study could also explore an outdoor pool model or a hybrid model—where “hybrid” refers to designs that combine features of both indoor and outdoor pools, such as an outdoor pool with a roof or partial enclosure that allows for open-air exposure.

RESIDENT SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS

Gabriola Island Respondents

Indoor Recreation Facilities and Amenities that Should be More Readily Available or Enhanced



SECTION 5

THE GAME PLAN FOR PARKS AND TRAILS IN ELECTORAL AREA B

5.1. Summary of Identified Priorities for Parks and Trails

The Strategies and Actions contained in this section (5.2.) are based on engagement, research, and spatial analysis of the parks, trails, and water access system. The following table summarizes identified priorities along with corresponding rationale from community engagement and research.

Table 9. Key Parks and Trails Research and Engagement Considerations

Community priorities	Identified through the Engagement	Identified through the Research	Key Findings, Rationale and Planning Considerations
Optimizing existing designated park space.	✓	✓	» The overall provision of park space in Electoral Area B is significantly higher than other Electoral Areas within the RDN. However, most residential parcels are not within easy walking distance to a diversity of parks, and geographic inequities exist across EA B. » Overall resident satisfaction with the parks system among Gabriola Island residents was relatively high with room for improvement (approximately two-thirds of EA B residents are satisfied to some degree with community park amenities, programming, and educational opportunities – with the highest proportion providing a “somewhat satisfied” level of response to the Resident Survey). Notably, a significantly lower level of satisfaction was expressed by Mudge and DeCourcy Island respondents (less than half expressed that they were satisfied with various aspects of park amenities and opportunities). » The context of multiple land managers within EA B results in both complexities and opportunities.

Community priorities	Identified through the Engagement	Identified through the Research	Key Findings, Rationale and Planning Considerations
Conservation of high value lands and ecosystems.	✓	✓	» The amount of land protected by the park and conservation network (approximately 12%) is below national and international targets (the federal government has set a target of 30% nationally). » Islands Trust has identified a number of biodiversity conservation priorities and at-risk species. » Approximately 10% of areas identified as containing sensitive ecosystems are currently protected, while 90% remain unprotected. » When asked about future priority setting criteria for natural / passive recreation parks within Electoral Area B: >60% of total EA B residents respondents identified that “new parkland acquisition to protect natural areas and special ecosystem” and “increased focus on habitat restoration and invasive species removal” should be priorities.
Increasing access and opportunities for residents that face barriers to parks and trails participation.		✓	» The current network of community parks and outdoor recreation amenities offers limited to no accessible or adaptive outdoor recreation opportunities for individuals with mobility disabilities, with many parks and trails having significant barriers to use. » Demographics and recreation trends suggest an increasing demand for accessible and adaptive outdoor recreation opportunities.
Improving access to the water and ensuring support amenities exist to enable safe use.	✓	✓	» When asked about specific amenity priorities, 32% of Gabriola Island Resident Survey respondents and 45% of Mudge and DeCourcy Islands respondents identified boat launches. The demand for these amenities for recreational vs transportation purposes requires further exploration. » Increased water access points and better safety and support amenities around existing launches were a key theme emanating from the community discussion sessions and other engagement activities. » Water access provision involves numerous complexities, including land ownership, jurisdictional responsibilities, and the need to protect sensitive ecosystems as well as areas of cultural and spiritual significance to First Nations.

Community priorities	Identified through the Engagement	Identified through the Research	Key Findings, Rationale and Planning Considerations
Providing purposeful, well managed, and diverse trail experiences.	✓	✓	» With approximately 90 km of trails, Gabriola Island is well supplied on a per capita basis. However, much of the trail network is concentrated in 707 and Cox Community Parks and is not evenly distributed across the Island. » The trails network on Mudge and DeCourcy Islands is limited. » Assessment of the trails network indicates that most existing trails are in good condition but lack experiential diversity and clear management objectives. » The majority of the trail network in EA B, including both formal and informal trails, is located on provincial Crown, federal Crown, and private lands. This creates a risk to public access, as trails on these lands are subject to changes in access policies that could significantly impact trail connectivity on Gabriola Island. For example, GaLTT has secured public trail access on private lands through individual trail licenses; however, these agreements can be revoked by the landowner at any time. Similarly, access to unsanctioned Crown land trails remains vulnerable, as they too can be closed or restricted without notice. As a result, the trail network's long-term viability and connectivity depend on securing more stable and permanent access arrangements across these lands. » Over a quarter of Electoral Area B Resident Survey respondents identified natural surface trails as a priority for investment (top 3 amenity type among both Gabriola Island and Mudge / DeCourcy Islands respondents).
Addressing connectivity and amenity gaps in the trails and broader active transportation network.	✓	✓	» The end-to-end trail connection between the ferry terminal and Descanso Bay to Drumbeg Provincial Park remains a significant connectivity gap within the system. » Visitor comfort and convenience amenities along trails are limited and inconsistently available. These amenities, such as benches, garbage bins, and washrooms, are often not universally accessible. » Active transportation challenges, gaps, and opportunities were frequently highlighted during the engagement process and continue to be a key concern for many residents, particularly on Gabriola Island. Challenges and barriers to active transportation frequently identified through the engagement included the lack of sidewalks and accessible pathways (e.g. surfaces suitable for strollers and mobility support equipment) as well as the nature of Gabriola Islands road infrastructure (narrow roads with no or minimal shoulders, hills and sharp corners, etc.).

5.2. Parks and Trails Strategies and Actions

Strategy #5: Prioritize conservation and protection of high-value ecosystems and culturally sensitive sites.

Action 5A: Work with Snuneymuxw First Nation, Islands Trust, and senior governments to identify and prioritize sensitive parks, trails, and water access areas for future planning and protection.

Protecting our vital lands and ecosystems is a priority of the RDN Board, reflected in the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan and the Parks and Trails Strategy, 2022.

Through collaborative, conservation-focused planning, mutually beneficial goals and priorities can be identified. Key considerations for future parks, trails, and water access planning include:

- » Planning efforts, such as a water access strategy, will incorporate expert input to help identify and map ecologically important areas, along with archaeological and cultural sites of significance to First Nations.
- » Snuneymuxw First Nation will be invited to participate in project planning related to parks, trails, and water access in Electoral Area B, and to identify their preferred role and level of involvement in collaboration with the RDN.

Action 5B: Strengthen the conservation network through strategic land acquisitions.

Analysis of the park system and past planning by the Islands Trust clearly identifies a need to expand conservation efforts to protect at-risk species and habitats.

The following map (Figure 6) provides an overview of the conservation network as well as identified sensitive and rare ecosystems.

KEY FACTS AND THE NEED FOR CONSERVATION

- » The Islands Trust Area that includes Electoral Area B has been identified by the federal government as one of 11 priority places in Canada for addressing the conservation of species at risk.
- » More than 300 species are at risk in the Islands Trust Area (25% of all species in British Columbia). Currently, only a small proportion of sensitive ecosystems are protected within Electoral Area B.
- » Approximately 13% of land in Electoral Area B is protected by the conservation network – significantly lower than federal targets and best practices.

Overview of Identified Sensitive and Rare Primary Ecosystems

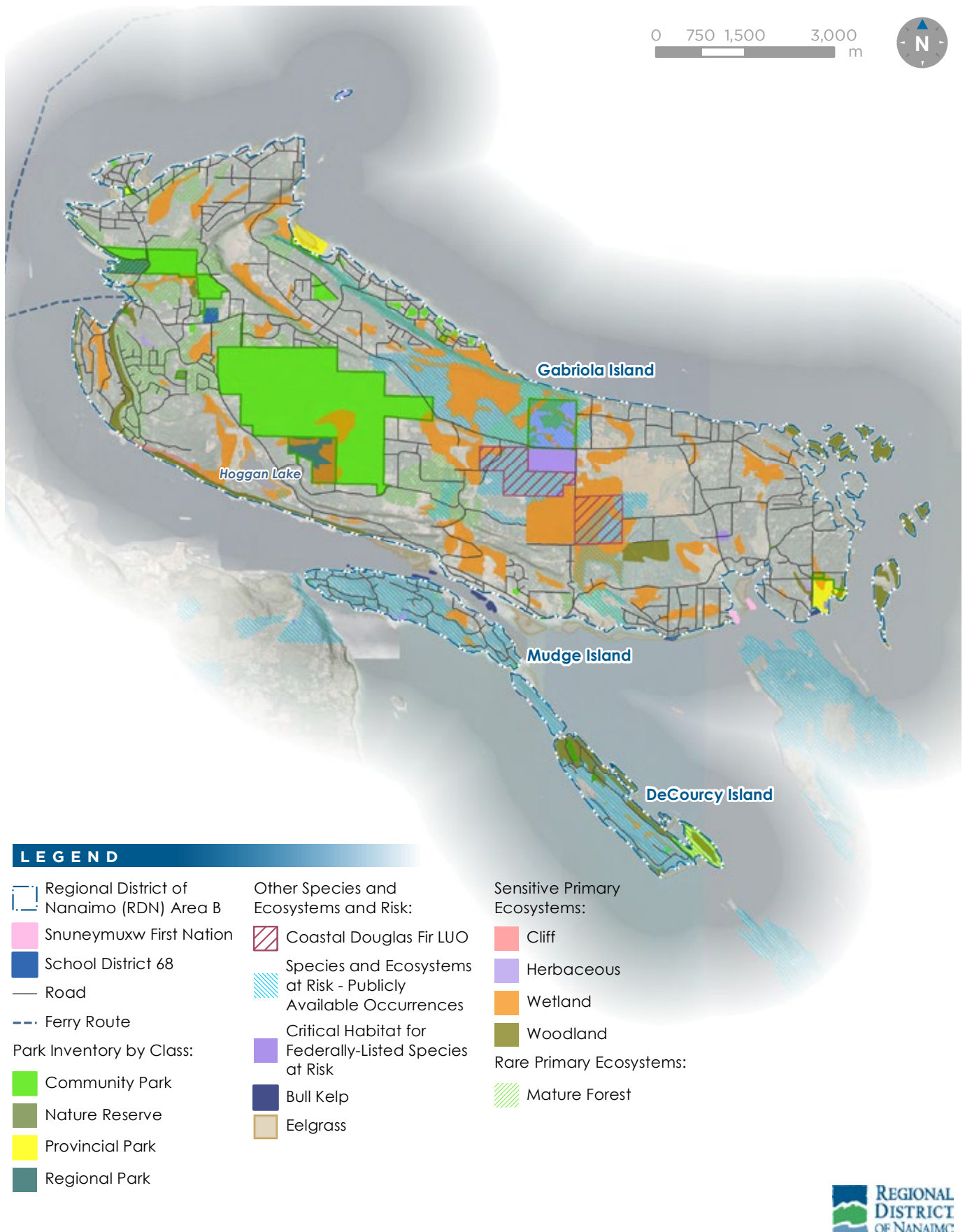


Figure 6 Sensitive and Rare Ecosystems Map

To strengthen the conservation network, key strategies include:

- » Acquiring parkland strategically, with a focus on sites with high ecological value and vulnerability.
- » Updating park classifications and management frameworks for Regional and Community parks to enhance protection for at-risk and ecologically significant areas, while implementing strategies to manage access and use.
- » Continuing collaboration with local and regional partner organizations to develop and implement conservation-focused strategies and practices.



Strategy #6: Formalize, expand, and enhance the network of water access sites.

Action 6A: Undertake a Water Access Needs Assessment.

Access to the waterfront is a fundamental and highly valued aspect of life in Electoral Area B. While some residents have direct access to the waterfront via their property, others rely on safe and accessible trails to reach water bodies for recreational, leisure, and cultural purposes. Ensuring equitable access to the shore is essential for allowing everyone to enjoy the stunning natural environment in which Electoral Area B is situated.

Community engagement has highlighted a strong desire for additional improved, publicly managed water access sites to support both transportation and recreational needs. However, as is common on the south coast and Gulf Islands, public water access is complicated by multiple jurisdictions, private ownership, and conservation risks and concerns.

A preliminary analysis of water access points was conducted as part of the Master Plan research and context review. This included site visits and the use of GIS data, which provided a foundational understanding of the water access inventory and underscored the need for a more in-depth, technical study. The recommended Needs Assessment will evaluate current access points, identify gaps, and clarify community, First Nations, and environmental considerations for improving or expanding access.

Of the total 68 km of shoreline on Gabriola, Mudge, and DeCourcy Islands, 79% is privately owned, 10% falls within the designated public park system, and the remaining 11% is within Crown land rights-of-way. Among the 135 water access sites, 104 are located on Provincial Crown lands as part of a Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MoTT) right of-way. The RDN currently manages 18 of these sites, 15 of which are hand launch sites. Of the 9 formalized powerboat launch sites in Electoral Area B, 5 are government-operated, while 4 are managed by non-governmental organizations, including private entities and non-profit societies.



The following table outlines suggested key components of the recommended Water Access Needs Assessment.

Table 10. Water Access Needs Assessment – Recommended Scope

Study Component	Key Scope Elements
Inventory, Assessment, and Mapping	» Confirm and categorize all water access points through a detailed inventory. » Assess the condition of infrastructure (e.g., stairs, parking, trails, signage, accessibility) and identify safety risks from aging infrastructure, erosion, or lack of support. » Identify water access sites that may impact archaeological, social, ceremonial, or culturally significant areas for First Nations. » Evaluate the potential ecological impact of new or expanded water access sites on foreshores, intertidal zones, and marine ecosystems.
Public Engagement	» Differentiate between actual demand and perceived need for recreational and non-recreational boat launch sites. » Better understand specific characteristics of use and secondary activities (e.g. parking of vehicles on Gabriola Island by Mudge and DeCourcy residents accessing services or the ferry to Nanaimo). » Identify key challenges and issues with existing sites, including factors specifically influencing site preference. » Assess priority amenities and their impacts on user- experience, safety, and behaviour.
Recommendations and Future Guidance	» Develop strategies to address identified needs and gaps in water access. » Define clear typologies for water access points, including recommendations for specifications for amenities, and key characteristics. » Implement measures to protect ecologically sensitive areas, including foreshores, intertidal zones, and marine ecosystems, while identifying sites unsuitable for formal water access. » Enhance safety and mitigate issues at existing access points. » Explore solutions for Mudge Island residents' launch needs if further validated by the Water Access Needs Assessment. » Identify potential partnerships with public and private entities to improve water access in Electoral Area B.

Action 6B: Implement the Water Access Needs Assessment Recommendations.

The findings and direction provided by the Water Access Needs Assessment (as per Action 6A) should guide the RDN in setting priorities for water access infrastructure and management. A key aspect of the Needs Assessment is to clearly define and distinguish between

“recreational” and “transportation” water access needs and priorities. Implementing these recommendations will likely require coordination across multiple RDN departments, as well as collaboration with regional partners and senior levels of government.



Strategy #7: Optimize park experiences through planning and maintenance.

Action 7A: Develop a new management plan for Cox Community Park.

Cox Community Park currently lacks a management plan. While smaller in scale than the 707 Community Park, it serves as an important nature-based recreation area, particularly for residents on the northwest side of Gabriola Island. A dedicated Cox Community Park Management Plan will help balance passive and active recreation, amenities, and conservation objectives.

Additionally, a new management plan for Cox Community Park will ensure that the park and its amenities are best positioned to meet increasing future use and visitation. Cox Community Park's proximity to the highest density residential area on Gabriola Island and the likelihood that most future residential growth will occur on the northwest side of the island is likely to result in an increasing level of visitation in coming decades. Focused management planning will help ensure that this visitation balances meeting recreation needs with conservation.





7B: Update the existing 707 Community Park Management Plan

The last management plan for 707 Community Park was developed in 2010. Since that time, the park has expanded significantly, and both the volume and types of use have increased. The addition of new lands over the past decade, along with adjacency to Coats Marsh Regional Park, has created a site that supports both active recreation and conservation.

The 2010 Management Plan for 707 Community Park has been useful at guiding direction and management of the environment and assets within the park but requires renewal to ensure that this high value community and regional asset is best positioned to meet a wide array of recreational and conservation objectives. An updated 707 Community Park Management Plan should be developed with a focus on the following key topics and management issues:

- » Defining clear visitor use and management objectives.
- » Updating the inventory of sensitive, invasive and at-risk ecological areas, with mitigation strategies and potential designation or classification of areas requiring specific conservation measures or access restrictions.
- » Enhancing trail diversity and appeal to improve user experience and discourage unauthorized trail building or modifications (e.g. ensuring the formal trail system meets the needs of regular users).
- » Reviewing amenities such as signage, washrooms, and parking.
- » Strengthen connection with adjacent public lands for integrated recreation opportunities.

Action 7C: Identify priorities for park accessibility investments and initiatives.

An analysis of the current park system in Electoral Area B reveals that nature-based opportunities are limited for individuals facing mobility or other physical barriers. While the goal is for most parks and trails to be fully accessible, the RDN and its partners will need to set priorities and focus efforts over the next 10 years. Examples of potential accessibility improvement projects that are recommended for consideration include:

- » Ramps
- » Washrooms (improvement of existing and additional washrooms where needed to facilitate increased park accessibility and use)
- » Improved amenities and access points at trail heads (e.g. improved surfacing at trail heads and between parking/staging areas and trails)
- » Trail improvements (including widening and surfacing to accommodate a range of mobility devices)

Identified in Table 11 are recommended steps towards improving accessibility in Electoral Area B parks and trails.

Table 11. Accessibility Improvement Tactics and Next Steps

Step #	Tactics	Description
1	Accessibility audits <i>*The RDN's Parks and Trails Strategy (2022) recommends that accessibility audits occur on a regular basis to ensure amenities meet best practice standards and facilitate access to nature-based environments.</i>	» Conduct accessibility audits as part of management plans for 707 Community Park and Cox Community Park. » Perform additional accessibility audits for other park and trail locations with known barriers and high levels of use. » Integrate accessibility audits into future strategic planning processes (e.g. Water Access Needs Assessment).
2	Identify potential projects	» Use the findings from accessibility audits to identify and estimate costs for potential improvement projects. » Engage with local residents, site users, and interest groups to gather input on potential projects, as needed. » Ensure that engagement and community outreach activities include individuals with accessibility challenges.
3	Prioritize projects	» RDN staff and partners will rank potential accessibility improvement projects based on their benefits (such as enhancing accessibility or improving user experience) and available resources (such as funding and available staff and volunteer time). This prioritization will ensure that the most impactful and feasible projects are addressed first.

7D: Evaluate maintenance and capital asset replacement requirements to ensure sufficient funding for a sustainable, well-maintained parks and trails system.

The parks and trails system in Electoral Area B will need to balance meeting the core mandate of providing accessible and diverse nature based recreation experiences while preserving high value cultural and ecological sites. Achieving this balance will require re-investment into existing infrastructure and targeted investments as identified throughout the Master Plan.

It is recommended that the RDN identify long-term resourcing requirements for parks and trail maintenance, amenity renewal, and overall investment to guide budgeting and resource allocation.



Action 7E: Study dog management options and approaches for Gabriola Island.

The resident survey indicates strong demand for improved dog management in parks and open spaces, with off-leash dog parks identified as one of the top desired amenities. Effectively managing off-leash dog activity in parks and open spaces offers numerous benefits, including:

- » Improved safety for people and dogs.
- » Protection of at-risk and sensitive ecosystems and species.
- » Encouragement of responsible dog ownership and enhanced enjoyment for all.

It is recommended that the RDN conduct further research into dog management options and approaches for Gabriola Island as part of a broader region-wide dog management planning process. This will ensure alignment with regional best practices and provide clear guidance on:

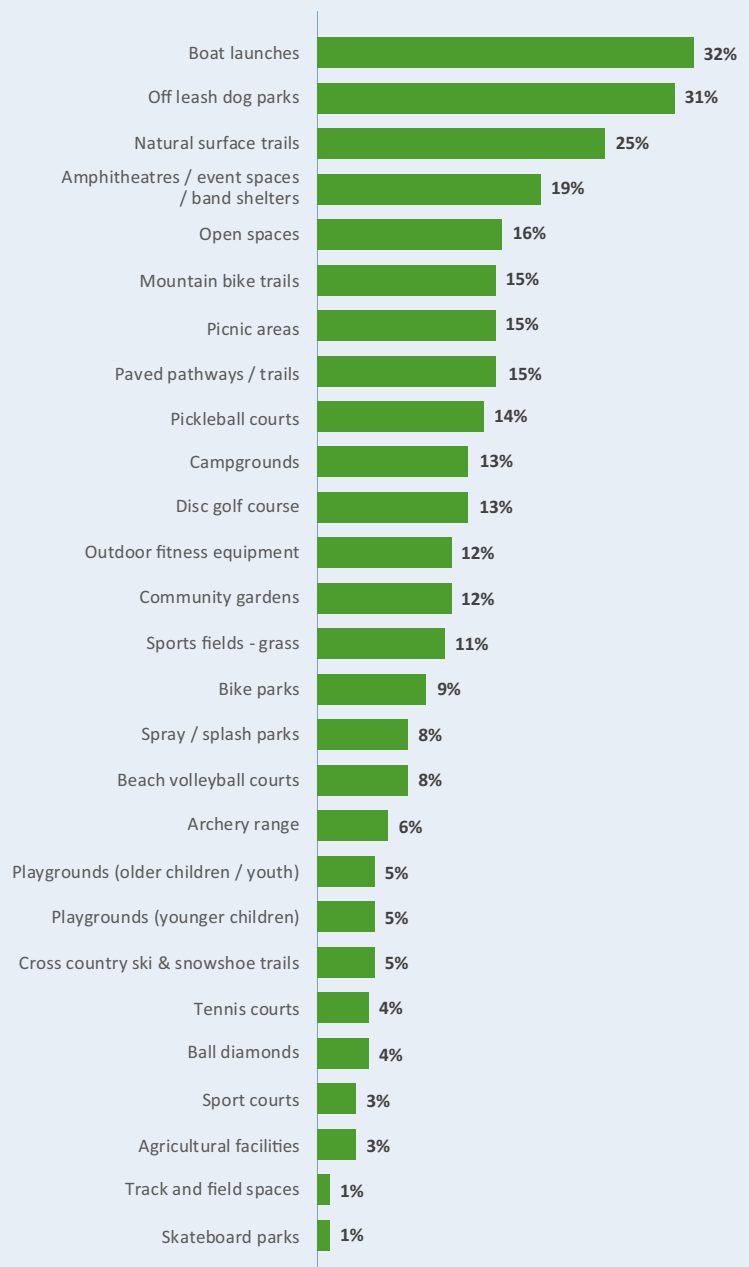
- » The need for and feasibility (capital and operational) of designated dog areas.
- » Potential revisions to existing dog management policies and permitted uses in parks and trails.
- » Desired characteristics of dog-friendly spaces (e.g. large open spaces vs smaller spaces or linear trails, amenity needs, etc.).
- » Approaches to managing the demand for access to water that balances the benefits of providing these opportunities for dog owners with protecting sensitive ecosystems and habitats.

The planning process should be informed by research on dog management trends, best practices, and available data on local and regional dog ownership, gathered through targeted community engagement and emerging data-sourcing methods (e.g. mobility and movement tracking data).

RESIDENT SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS

Gabriola Island Respondents

Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Amenities that Should be More Readily Available or Enhanced on Gabriola, Mudge, and DeCourcy Island



Strategy #8: Secure, connect and diversify the trail network.

Action 8A: Work towards creating a well-connected trail network that provides safe, direct routes between key destinations, with a focus on linking the ferry terminal and Drumbeg Provincial Park.

The trails network on Gabriola Island is generally well developed, but key gaps remain that affect both recreational and active transportation use. A significant opportunity exists to complete an end-to-end spine trail connecting the BC Ferries terminal at Descanso Bay in the north to Drumbeg Provincial Park in the south. This would create a continuous trail route linking key parks, attractions, and service hubs across the Island. Completing these trail linkages will enhance connectivity for both residents and visitors, support recreation, and facilitate active transportation. By addressing these gaps, the trail system will provide better access to outdoor spaces and encourage healthier lifestyles while contributing to the overall well-being of the community.

To advance the overall goal of increased trail connectivity and a contiguous end to end trail on Gabriola Island, the following next steps are recommended:

- » Develop a Trail Connectivity and Active Transportation Plan to identify key gaps, priorities, and opportunities for improving the Island trail network. This will include mapping existing trails, analyzing connectivity barriers, and proposing priority projects that enhance both recreational and active transportation linkages.
- » Continue to work with GaLTT to secure access to the necessary lands for completing the end-to-end trail route and addressing broader connectivity gaps between parks, trails, and water access points.
- » Continue to engage with First Nations, Islands Trust, the Province (MoTT and BC Parks), and private landowners to understand concerns, issues and opportunities for improving trail connectivity and active transportation infrastructure.
- » Ensure that future trail planning aligns with the recommended Water Access Needs Assessment and park management planning (e.g. 707 Community Park and Cox Community Park) to enhance connectivity and support trail-based recreation.

Future trail planning in Electoral Area B should focus on creating more diverse and engaging trail experiences. Although the current trail network is relatively uniform, there are opportunities to diversify and enhance its appeal through the provision of a more diverse trail network. Expanding the variety of trail experiences will help protect at-risk species and ecosystems by encouraging users to stay on designated routes, while also improving safety and reducing unauthorized trail creation.





SECTION 6

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

6.1. Implementation Overview and Tracking

The Strategies and Actions contained in the Master Plan will be implemented over the next 10+ years and may require updating during that timeframe as trends, issues, and new opportunities emerge. Resourcing (capital and operating) will impact the timing of implementation and the overall ability to achieve the Strategies and Actions contained in the Master Plan – as such, it is important to recognize that resourcing is reliant on a variety of factors including the propensity of the tax base to consider requisition increases, success with grant applications, and the overall costs of providing services (e.g. inflation, unexpected capital maintenance, the ability to leverage volunteer support, etc.).

The following tactics are recommended to support the tracking, evaluation, and potential updating of the Master Plan.

- » Report annually on the status of the Strategies and Actions and report on progress to key community partners and interest groups (e.g. member organizations represented as part of the Advisory Committee).
- » Consider conducting a Priority Assessment in 5-7 years that builds on the key engagement and research methods used in this project—focusing on comparable inputs to track changes and emerging trends. Use these findings to identify potential updates or additions that may be required to the Master Plan’s Strategies and Actions.

6.2. Implementation Plan

The following table identifies potential timing / sequencing and high-level resource requirements for the Strategies and Actions contained in Sections 4 and 5 “Game Plans”. It is recommended that this table be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

**Resource amount is currently included in the 2026-2030 5-Year EA B Community Parks Capital Budget*

ESTIMATED TIMEFRAME DESCRIPTION

Immediate = Next 12 months

Short = 0 to 5 years

Medium = 5 – 10 Years

Long-Term = 10+

Ongoing = Continued practice

Table 12. Implementation Plan

Actions	Timeframe	Resources Needed	Deliverables	Outcomes
STRATEGY #1: OPTIMIZE RECREATION SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH CONTINUED COLLABORATION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT.				
1A: Continue to partner with Gabriola Recreation Society (GRS) and identify opportunities to support organizational capacity.	Ongoing	Annual funding as per terms of service agreement. Funded by tax requestion from Gabriola residents. RDN Recreation Services Staffing + GRS Staffing	Recreation Services Agreement between RDN and GRS	Continued quality recreation programming.
1B: Continue to monitor trends and emerging recreational opportunity demand.	Ongoing	RDN Recreation Services Staffing + GRS Staffing	Recreation programming which is responsive to community demands.	Alignment of service delivery and investment with residents’ activities and benefits.

Actions	Timeframe	Resources Needed	Deliverables	Outcomes
STRATEGY #2: EXPLORE THE VIABILITY OF DEVELOPING A MULTI-PURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRE ON GABRIOLA ISLAND.				
2A: Undertake a feasibility study for a multi-purpose community centre.	Short Term	\$50,000-\$100,000 for Consultant Services RDN Recreation Services Staffing Capital and operational costs to be identified in the study	Facility Feasibility Report	A clear understanding of the costs, viability, program elements, and potential site options and limitations.
STRATEGY #3: IMPROVE SPORT FIELD EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES.				
3A: Investigate options to add more sports field capacity.	Short Term	\$150,000 - 200,000 * for Consultant Services RDN Parks Services Staffing Construction and operational costs to be identified through the design.	Sports Field Action Plan + Detailed Design	Understanding of the opportunities and limitations associated with existing infrastructure. Report outlining costs, viability, sites options, and limitations for potential field development. Concept, preliminary and detailed design, costing and budget estimates.
3B: Continue to work collaboratively to improve sport field bookings and allocations policies and practices.	Short Term	RDN Recreation Services Staffing + GRS Staffing	Field and Court Allocation Procedure/ Policy	Optimization of field use, management, and allocation.

Actions	Timeframe	Resources Needed	Deliverables	Outcomes
STRATEGY #4: INCREASE RESIDENT ACCESS TO AQUATICS OPPORTUNITIES.				
4A: Consider formalizing an agreement with the private pool operator on Gabriola Island to secure increased public access.	Ongoing	GRS Staffing + RDN Recreation Services Staffing	User Agreement	If viable, increased access to aquatics opportunities and programming during the summer months.
4B: Explore opportunities to increase access to indoor aquatics facilities in Nanaimo for Gabriola Island residents.	Ongoing	RDN Recreation Services Staffing + GRS Staffing	Increased access to Nanaimo indoor aquatic facilities	If viable, opportunities to facilitate increased resident access to aquatics activities and programming.
4C: Explore opportunities to offer ocean-based aquatics programming.	Ongoing	GRS Staffing	Program development and delivery	If viable, increased resident comfort and skill levels in marine settings (resulting in increased safety and positive nature-based recreation activity).
4D: Revisit the viability of developing a pool facility in the long term.	Long Term	\$50,000 - \$70,000 for Consultant Services + RDN Recreation Services Staffing	Aquatic Facility Feasibility Report	
STRATEGY #5: PRIORITIZE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF HIGH-VALUE ECOSYSTEMS AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SITES.				
5A: Work with Snuneymuxw First Nation, Islands Trust, and senior governments to identify and prioritize sensitive parks, trails, and water access areas for future planning and protection.	Ongoing	\$ TBD for Consultant Services + Grant Funding + / or Partner Funding + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Overview assessment and mapping of sensitive ecological and culturally significant sites.	Improved understanding of sensitive environmental and cultural lands, informing protection, management, and planning decisions.
5B: Strengthen the conservation network through strategic land acquisitions.	Medium - Long Term	\$ TBD for Acquisition Costs + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Land Acquisition	Increase in lands protected through the formal parks network.

Actions	Timeframe	Resources Needed	Deliverables	Outcomes
STRATEGY #6: FORMALIZE, EXPAND, AND ENHANCE THE NETWORK OF WATER ACCESS SITES.				
6A: Undertake a Water Access Needs Assessment.	Short Term	\$50,000 for Consultant Services + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Water Access Needs Assessment + Environmental and Cultural Assessments	A prioritized list of environmentally and culturally sensitive waterfront access improvements that address gaps in the current system.
6B: Implement the Water Access Needs Assessment Recommendations.	Medium Term	\$ TBD for Project Implementation Costs as per outcome of Needs Assessment. + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Water Access Improvement Projects	Improved water access opportunities to support nature-based recreation.
STRATEGY #7: OPTIMIZE PARK EXPERIENCES THROUGH PLANNING AND MAINTENANCE.				
7A: Develop a new management plan for Cox Community Park.	Short-Medium Term	\$10,000* for Consultant Services + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Cox Community Park Management Plan	If applicable, apply the findings of the multi-use community centre and sports field feasibility planning to establish clear, strategic direction for management and capital investment to optimize use, benefits, and conservation.
7B: Update the existing 707 Community Park Management Plan	Medium Term	\$25,000 for Consultant Services + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Updated 707 Community Park Management Plan	If applicable, apply the findings of the multi-use community centre and sports field feasibility planning to establish clear strategic direction for management and capital investment to optimize use, benefits, and conservation.
7C: Identify priorities for park accessibility investments and initiatives.	Short-Medium Term	\$20,000 (EA B portion) for Consultant Services + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Region-wide accessibility assessment with specific actions for EA B	Improved access and equity, especially for individuals facing barriers to parks and nature-based recreation.

Actions	Timeframe	Resources Needed	Deliverables	Outcomes
7D: Evaluate maintenance and capital asset replacement requirements to ensure sufficient funding for a sustainable, well-maintained parks and trails system.	Short-Medium Term	RDN Corporate Services Staffing + Parks Services Staffing	Asset Management Plan for Electoral Area B Community Parks and Halls	A well-maintained parks and trails system.
7E: Study dog management options and approaches for Gabriola Island.	Short Term	\$10,000 (EA B portion) for Consultant Services + RDN Parks Services Staffing	Region-wide dog management strategy with specific actions for EA B	Improved management of dogs, leading to increased safety for both humans and dogs, while addressing environmental concerns.
STRATEGY #8: SECURE, CONNECT AND DIVERSIFY THE TRAIL NETWORK.				
8A: Work towards creating a well-connected trail network that provides safe, direct routes between key destinations, with a focus on linking the ferry terminal and Drumbeg Provincial Park.	Short Term	\$45,900* + Grant Funding for Consultant Services RDN Parks Services Staffing	Active Transportation Planning - Village Way extension to ferry terminal	Provides guidance on how to improve connectivity and advance key objectives (e.g. Village Way trail extension and End-to-End trail); resulting in a trail network that supports recreation and active transportation.
	Medium Term	\$50,000 + Grant Funding for Consultant Services RDN Parks Services Staffing	System-Wide Trail Connectivity and Active Transportation Network Plan	





