TO: Committee of the Whole  
FROM: Kelsey Cramer  
        Parks Planner

MEETING: May 12, 2020  
FILE: 2240-20

SUBJECT: Mount Benson Trail Improvement Partnership Agreement

RECOMMENDATION

That the Mount Benson Trail Improvement Partnership Agreement with the Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia be approved.

SUMMARY

The Regional District entered into a two-year pilot agreement in 2018 with the Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia to support and improve the environmental and recreational condition of the Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail and trails within Mount Benson Regional Park. The pilot trail improvement project successfully improved a portion of the trail just inside the Park boundary. A longer-term agreement is needed to enable this trail restoration project to continue. The RDN Parks Division is now looking to enter into a five-year agreement for the Benson View Regional trail (replaces the former Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail) and trails within Mount Benson Regional Park. The Island Mountain Ramblers, a member of the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC, wish to participate in the volunteer trail restoration project.

BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2017, RDN Parks Services was contacted by the President of the Island Mountain Ramblers (the Club), an unincorporated member Club of the Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia (FMCBC), based in Nanaimo. The Club was interested in an opportunity to begin a long-term volunteer trail restoration project in the Nanaimo area and had identified Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail and trails in Mount Benson Regional Park as a preferred site. In collaboration with RDN Parks staff and the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust (NALT), volunteer work occurred over the summer of 2019. Erosion repair work was implemented along a portion of ‘Straight-to-the-Top’ trail just inside the Park boundary. There is more trail improvement work required in the project area and additional time is needed to allow the work to occur due to volunteer availability and environmental constraints including snow and forest fire risk.

The RDN does not have sufficient resources to resolve trail issues to the extent that is required. The support from a dedicated volunteer group is critical to improving the environmental conditions of the trail and the recreational experience for hikers.

The original Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail Improvement Partnership Agreement expires in May 2020. The parties met and assessed the pilot project in late 2019 and agreed to a longer-term trail improvement partnership over a 5-year period, with option for subsequent renewal. As per
the renewal clause in the original agreement, an updated agreement (Attachment 1) has been prepared to reflect the interest in a longer-term and to reflect changes in trail alignment that came in with the opening of the new Mount Benson parking lot. The former Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail (WLRT) has been replaced by the Benson View Regional Trail (BVRT), managed under Provincial authorization, as the official route into Mount Benson Regional Park.

The FMCBC will enter into the agreement with the RDN on behalf of the Club, who will be undertaking the work, because the FMCBC is a registered society in BC. The Club does not have the ability to enter into an agreement because it is not a legal entity.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. That the Mount Benson Trail Improvement Partnership Agreement be approved.

2. That the Mount Benson Trail Improvement Partnership Agreement not be approved, and alternative direction be provided to staff.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The agreement presents an annual allocation for materials to support the volunteer efforts that will be paid from the Regional Parks & Trails Operations budget. Approximately $2000 annually is estimated.

**STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

Environmental Stewardship - Protect and enhance the natural environment, including land, water, and air quality for future generations.

The planned volunteer trail restoration work will improve the quality of the hiking experience, mitigate erosion, minimize vegetation loss, and protect water quality on the slopes of Mount Benson.

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Kelsey Cramer
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April 20, 2020

Reviewed by:
- Y. Gagnon, Manager, Parks Services
- T. Osborne, General Manager, Recreation and Parks Services
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment:
1. Mount Benson Trail Improvement Partnership Agreement