

REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR RAINWATER MANAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board endorse the Regional Strategy for Rainwater Management for collaborative implementation with member municipalities, Provincial agencies, and community partners.

BACKGROUND

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP) includes the commitment to develop a regional strategy for rainwater management, in collaboration with member municipalities and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI). This commitment is being actioned through the RDN Drinking Water and Watershed Protection (DWWP) Action Plan 2.0, providing the staff resources to coordinate efforts and most of the budget to engage consultants in leading the Strategy development process.

Rainwater management is defined as the management of precipitation across the landscape and associated strategies to protect the health of watersheds and maintain a natural water balance. Rainwater, by its nature is cross-jurisdictional. It rains across political boundaries and run-off flows across the landscape affecting all land uses, ecosystems and activities. This means there are many organizations and individuals involved in managing rainwater on different scales. Collaboration is essential to ensure a holistic and effective approach to maintaining the water balance across the landscape in a changing climate, amidst land use changes and development. As part of the regional strategy for rainwater management, the LWMP outlines that the RDN will consider subdivision development standards (i.e. green infrastructure policies, erosion and sediment control standards, onsite rainwater management, watercourse and wetland protection) and non-point source control (i.e. runoff pollution).

The following process was used to develop the Regional Strategy for Rainwater Management (RSRM) that is presented to the Board for endorsement in Attachment 1.

- A regional Rainwater Working Group was struck, including municipal staff, RDN interdepartmental staff, MOTI staff and Mosaic Forest Management staff to develop a scope of work for the development of the RSRM.
- A Request for Statement of Qualifications was posted seeking consulting expertise to support this project. Emmons and Olivier Resource Inc. (EOR) was the top-ranked proponent and were engaged to lead this project alongside RDN staff.
- Consultants performed a document review and jurisdictional scan, facilitated stakeholder workshops for technical feedback, drafted the strategy based on those primary inputs, presented to the public for feedback¹, and incorporated input from technical reviewers and the public into the final RSRM document.

¹ Please see *Attachment 2 – What We Heard Engagement Summary with Appendices* for details on the public engagement

The Highlights of the Strategy

The Regional Strategy for Rainwater Management is a foundational document to guide the RDN's efforts in managing precipitation (all rain events, not just storms) across the regional land base, in a collaborative manner that aims at the following common objectives:

- Maintaining groundwater recharge
- Mitigating flooding
- Protecting water quality
- Enhancing climate resilience

The Strategy outlines a framework for achieving a resilient approach to rainwater management in the region, structured as follows:

Set the Foundation → complete watershed studies, continue watershed monitoring, generate regional climate change projections, complete a funding assessment.

Develop Performance Targets → use the foundational studies and data to set targets for: release rate, retention volume, recharge volume, water quality to be applied to development within the region's watersheds. While watershed-specific targets are being developed, interim regional targets can be implemented as a stop-gap.

Implement Technical, Policy and Planning Tools → compile regional design standards and specifications for rainwater infrastructure, as well as develop regional guidance documents and manuals to support a comprehensive technical approach to rainwater management regionally; update policies, bylaws, development permit areas (DPAs), official community plans (OCPs); explore the use of covenants; update the development approvals process to include new requirements such as meeting performance targets; deliver targeted outreach and education programming on rainwater management; include a rainwater management focus in asset management planning including natural assets and parkland co-benefits; explore regional programs on recharge management and rainwater facilities.

Next Steps & Priorities for Implementation

1. Ensure ongoing asset management discussions advance the integration of natural assets particular to rainwater management. This includes considering rainwater management risks and co-benefits not only in stormwater asset class discussions but also including a rainwater perspective to add nuance to the other asset classes that intersect with rainwater (for example, parkland, transportation, buildings).
2. Continue discussions with member municipalities (and, where applicable, the Province) to further develop the willingness and logistics required to adopt a regional approach to rainwater management, including: performance target setting, closing loopholes in existing regulatory language, implementation of regional programs and developing regional climate change projections.
3. Investigate potential for regional off-setting/banking programs to support rainwater infiltration and groundwater supplies; this may be best accomplished through advocacy to the Province in partnership with other regions and municipalities.
4. Assess available options to secure sustainable funding for rainwater management initiatives, capital projects and advocacy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost for implementation of the Regional Strategy for Rainwater Management (RSRM) in its entirety is not yet fully quantified. Several of the foundational tasks within the RSRM are aligned with the Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Action Plan 2.0 and will be funded through the existing approved operating budget and workplan for the DWWP function. Detailed costing of many of the recommended actions in the strategy will need to take place as part of next steps. Where additional funding is required to support broader implementation of actions within the RSRM, options will be presented to the Board for approval, informed by the funding options assessment that is outlined as a priority action in the strategy (see Section 4.4. in the RSRM, Attachment 1).

As the Liquid Waste Management Plan Amendment takes place over the next couple of years, there is an opportunity to source additional funds to support further rainwater initiatives under the RSRM through that funding mechanism. Member municipalities have existing operating budgets for stormwater infrastructure and services. Through discussions with municipal partners, additional or repurposed funding sources via rainwater utility fees, development cost charges, cash-in-lieu, and grants can be investigated to expand financial support for the regional efforts under the RSRM.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

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

Growth Management - Provide effective regional land use planning and responsible asset management for both physical infrastructure and natural assets.

Climate Change - Be leaders in climate change adaptation and mitigation, and become net zero by 2032.

People and Partnerships - Seek opportunities to partner with the provincial and federal governments, other government agencies, and community stakeholder groups in order to advance strategic plan goals and objectives.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Final Version – Regional Strategy for Rainwater Management (without Appendices; available upon request)
2. What We Heard – Engagement Summary – Regional Strategy for Rainwater Management (with Appendices)