



FRENCH CREEK COMMUNITY PARK DEVELOPMENT

RECOMMENDATION

That the French Creek Community Park improvements proposed in the staff report be included in the 2024 Parks Services workplan.

BACKGROUND

At the January 25, 2022, RDN Board meeting, the following motion was approved:

It was moved and seconded that a report be provided with recommendations and costs for French Creek Community Park development consisting of identification and protection of the 30m riparian habitat setback zone through trail delineation with designated creek viewpoint accesses, informative and educational signage about the creek and its sensitive riparian areas and split-rail cedar fencing to restrict park visitors from all areas except designated routes.

At the September 27, 2022, RDN Board meeting, the following motion was approved:

That staff prepare a report on the process and costs for the addition of public access trails at 1236 Island Highway for connectivity with French Creek Community Park

French Creek Community Park is a 3-hectare community park located between Lee Road West and Island Highway West in Electoral Area G (Attachment 1 – French Creek Community Park Map). It borders the south shore of French Creek for approximately 400 metres.

The property was dedicated as a community park in 1994 through the land subdivision process and the park has several registered encumbrances including flooding and drainage covenants, an easement for private drainage, and easement for access and a statutory-right-of-way for public drainage works.

This forested park is located in a low-lying area prone to seasonal flooding and characterized with poorly drained soils with several small ephemeral wetlands. The park features an 'out and back' style linear gravel path.

In the winters of 2019 and 2020, severe windstorms combined with heavy rainfall downed several large trees in the park. These storms resulted in significant tree loss in the park.

In the 2021/2022 winter, a flooding event in French Creek resulted in a large log jam within the creek adjacent to park property. The emergency works to remove the log jam required heavy equipment access through the park and resulted in the removal of several large trees. Since then, restoration work within the park has included planting trees and resurfacing the existing gravel trail.

Identification and protection of the 30m riparian habitat setback zone through trail delineation with designated creek viewpoint accesses

Currently, trails within the park are primarily outside of the 30m riparian buffer, with only a small section of trail in the southwest less than 30m from the edge of the creek (Attachment 1 – French Creek Community Park Map). As such, it is recommended that the existing trail remain in place as relocating a small section may cause avoidable damage and disturbance to trees and habitats.

Seasonal changes in water levels within the creek have caused undercutting of the banks, creating a safety concern for park users who get too close to the edge of the creek. The creation of designated creek viewpoints could provide a safe and accessible means for park users to enjoy views of the creek from an appropriate distance while also discouraging foot traffic in the vegetated areas of the park.

The emergency construction works to remove the log jams during the previous winter flooding event created two access areas between the park path and the creek edge. These locations would be ideal for formalizing new viewpoint access areas to the creek.

Informative and educational signage about the creek and its sensitive riparian areas

French Creek Community Park features attractive views of this fish-bearing creek and an interesting diversity of native tree species. Interpretive signage could be installed along the path and within the creek viewpoint areas to enhance the park user's experience and offer educational opportunities.

Split-rail cedar fencing to restrict park visitors from all areas except designated routes

Aside from the existing trail and viewpoint to the creek, the park is densely vegetated. It also features hummocks mounds, ephemeral wetlands, uneven topography and wet soils. These conditions discourage park users from accessing off-trail areas of the site and as such trail braiding is not an issue.

If trail braiding within the park would become an issue, split rail fencing could be installed in strategic locations if needed.

Public access trails to Island Highway

Staff will prepare a detailed report to identify and assess a main trail connection between French Creek Community Park and the newly acquired land at 1236 Island Highway. The report will identify a potential trail location and the costs associated with trail development.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Table 1: French Creek Community Park Development Estimated Costs

ITEM	Estimated Cost
Design and installation of two creek viewpoint areas with connections to the main path	\$20,000
Design and installation of interpretive and wayfinding signage	\$5,000
Contingency	\$5,000
TOTAL	\$30,000

The Electoral Area G Community Park Preliminary 5-year Financial Plan includes \$75,000 in 2024 for future improvements to the park.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

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

REVIEWED BY:

A. Gore, Superintendent, Parks Planning Research and Development
Y. Gagnon, Manager, Parks Services
T. Moore, Acting Director of Finance
D. Banman, Acting General Manager, Recreation and Parks
D. Holmes, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

1. French Creek Community Park Map