
TO: Regional Parks and Trails Select Committee **MEETING:** October 9, 2018
FROM: Joan Michel
Parks and Trails Coordinator **FILE:** 2017-043/2018-043
SUBJECT: Big Qualicum River to Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Regional Trail Update

RECOMMENDATION

That the Big Qualicum River to Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Regional Trail Update be received.

SUMMARY

In late 2016, the Regional Board approved commencing with the planning of regional trail between the Big Qualicum River Regional Trail (BQRRT) and the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD). A working title for the initiative is the Big Qualicum River (BQR) to Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) Regional Trail. The initiative originated in the early 2000s with the rezoning of lands around Horne Lake, the RDN's commitment to the Qualicum First Nation to preserve and celebrate the historical cross-island passage through regional trail, and the Horne Lake Strata's commitment to provide land access for regional trail across the north shore of the lake. This regional trail project involves trail development and achieving Provincial recognition of a sea to sea, First Nation to First Nation BC heritage passage. See Attachment 1 for a project map.

With the assistance of the Horne Lake Strata and a geological engineering study, potential trail route on Strata lands was identified in 2017-18. Work continues on final survey and marking of the undeveloped public right-of-way linking Horne Lake with the ACRD, expected to be completed by the fall of 2019. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI), Horne Lake Strata membership, the Qualicum First Nations, the ACRD and the City of Port Alberni have received project briefs.

The formal planning and costed design of the BQR-ACRD Regional Trail and preparation of a land use agreement with the Strata are planned for 2019, with construction of the trail proposed for 2020. In 2020, Parks Services will work with the ACRD and First Nations both sides of the Island on the heritage passage component of the regional trail project and identification of a First Nation's name for the overall initiative to replace BQR-ACRD.

BACKGROUND

Trail Development – Strata Lands along the North Shore of Horne Lake

Horne Lake Strata lands between the BQRRT and the hydro corridor (see Attachment 1 map) offer existing footpath suitable for regional trail use. New trail will be needed on Strata lands to connect with the BQRRT and to cross the valley containing hydro (and gas) corridor.

Between the hydro corridor and Horne Lake Regional Park (HLRP) are designated hazard lands associated with Mount Mark and the rock slide on its western flank. In 2017, with the assistance of a \$10,000 BC Rural Dividends Program grant, Thurber Engineering Ltd was engaged to complete a geological engineering review of the hazard lands, assess the risk of trail development, and identify a suitable trail alignment. The Thurber study concluded that the risks posed by Mount Mark's natural geological hazards to Horne Lake Caves Road and the gas line that follows it would not likely be affected by the construction and operation of trail.

It is proposed that old logging roads situated 100-200 m above the Horne Lake Caves Road will serve as a trail route below Mount Mark. Below the rock slide, no safe route on the north side of the Caves Road was identified. Thurber recommends finishing the trail lakeside on Strata lands cleared of cottages in the early 2000s, and then using the road allowance – see Attachment 2, Big Rock Map. To the extent that this last section of Caves Road from the Big Rock to the entrance of the Regional Park runs close to the lake and may not provide room for a trail, a lakeside boardwalk can be considered to complete access to the Park.

In 2018, the Thurber report was forwarded to the Strata and a detailed project brief with timeline provided for circulation to Strata members in advance of their April annual general meeting. Parks Services met with DFO, MoTI, and RDN Current Planning staff to review the Thurber report and overall BQR-ACRD Regional Trail proposal. MoTI agrees that Horne Lake Caves Road is not suitable for use as trail corridor, and advises that no road widening is foreseen in the near future. DFO notes that the level of Horne Lake is managed and can vary 3.5 m or more over the course of the year. Development restrictions concerning Mount Mark hazard lands prohibit construction of structures but do not preclude trail development.

Trail Development – Horne Lake Regional Park to ACRD via 1911 Road

Planned trail route between HLRP and the ACRD border involves use of the only public right-of-way across the Beaufort Range between Hwy 4 and Courtenay: the 20 m wide 1911 Horne Lake and Alberni Road. While surveyed in 1911, the Road was never developed between the east end of Horne Lake and the ACRD border. Provincial land records of that section of the Road were lost until the rezoning of Horne Lake lands in 2001.

Since 2017, Parks Services has been working with the surveyor familiar with the 1911 Road from the Horne Lake rezoning project. Clarification of the Road's location on the ground south of HLRP is needed in order to complete a centre-line traverse from Park to ACRD border. Some of the 1911 Road has been surveyed and plans registered so its location is generally understood, however, plan discrepancies remain an issue. MoTI has been assisting Parks Services with resolution of the issue, which is expected to involve discussions with Island Timberlands, whose Block 188 is bisected by the 1911 Road. Assuming a resolution is achieved by spring 2019, and with the help of volunteers who look forward to trail development, a marked footpath is expected to be on the ground by the end of summer 2019.

Trail Development – Project Timeline for Planning through Construction

Over the fall-winter 2018-2019, a request for qualifications will be issued to identify a short list of firms deemed suitable to bid on a request for proposals (RFP) to design-build the BQR-ACRD Regional Trail. Most design-build effort will concern route under Mount Mark to the entrance of HLRP, with minor works only expected to be required along the remainder of the regional trail. Emphasis will be placed on safe passage and footpath standards will apply.

The RFP will identify two stages of work: (i) planning and costed design with options, and project permitting support, and (ii) construction. With Regional Board approval in 2019 of the proposed planning budget, Parks Services will issue the RFP with commitment to contract for stage (i) work. In the fall of 2019, the RDN will engage with the Horne Lake Strata on development of a formal land use agreement for regional trail. The agreement can address authorization of off-road vehicle use by Horne Lake Strata members.

Upon Regional Board approval of a construction budget for 2020, and conclusion of permitting and the RDN-Strata land use agreement, Parks Services will proceed with stage (ii) of the design-build contract and initiate construction.

Heritage Passage

In July 2017, Parks Services met with senior staff from the ACRD and the City of Port Alberni to review the regional trail and heritage passage project. A proponent of the initiative since 2001, the ACRD continues to support linkage of a BQR-ACRD Regional Trail with their Log Train Trail and nearby McLean Mill National Historic Site. City staff agree the trail and heritage passage projects will make a positive contribution to mid-Island tourism. Both agencies await further direction from the RDN as to project advancement.

Once regional trail development has progressed, Parks Services will move forward in 2020 with heritage passage planning, including identification of a First Nation's name for the regional trail and heritage passage. Collaboration with First Nations on both sides of the RDN - ACRD border will be required, and the RDN will depend upon their input for narrative development of the passage story. The story produced will form part of an updated application to the Province for heritage recognition to be expressed through signage and other communication products.

ALTERNATIVES

1. That the BQR-ACRD Regional Trail update be received
2. That alternate direction be provided.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The approved 2018 Regional Parks operating budget includes \$150,000 in planning dollars for the BQR-ACRD Regional Trail project, to be carried forward to 2019. As part of the design process, an asset replacement plan will be developed. Funds required to support the First Nations Heritage Passage will be clarified in 2019 during 2020 budget planning, and grant application opportunities pursued.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Development of the BQR-ACRD Regional Trail and First Nations Passage aligns with several RDN strategic priorities. Beyond providing a core service that builds upon existing regional trail and park investments, the project is evidence of the RDN's commitment to working in partnership with First Nations, major landowners, volunteers and neighbouring regions. The project should make a notable contribution to regional eco-tourism.



Joan Michel
jmichel@rdn.bc.ca
September 17, 2018

Reviewed by:

- W. Marshall, Manager of Parks Services
- T. Osborne, General Manager of Recreation and Parks Services
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments

1. Map of Proposed BQR-ACRD Regional Trail and First Nations Passage via Horne Lake
2. Big Rock Map