



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

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Legislation Text

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REQUEST FOR DECISION

DATE: August 30, 2021

Report No. P&R-21-004

TO: Laurie Hurst, Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Rick Daykin, Manager, Parks and Facilities

SUBJECT:

Saxe Point Park Natural Area Management Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the natural area management plan strategies outlined in staff report P&R 21-004 be approved.

RELEVANT POLICY:

The climate action plan will be a relevant document after it is approved.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE:

Enhance opportunities for Parks & Recreation

BACKGROUND:

Saxe Point Park is a world class municipal park located in the Township of Esquimalt. The park is situated on a peninsula overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca with incredible views of the Olympic Mountains. It is comprised of 14.75 acres of land containing large open spaces, beautiful gardens, 1.8 km of trails, a washroom facility, picnic areas, parking for 75 cars, 2 sandy beaches, dog friendly trails, a parks works yard, and forested and coastal bluff natural areas. It is a place of exceptional beauty and home to diverse flora and fauna. Saxe Point Park provides a genuine source of pride for residents and enjoyment for all visitors.

The development of natural area management plan strategies for Saxe Point Park is critical at this stage to help manage the effects of climate change and the increasing number of people who visit the park. The strategies presented in this report will help to protect and restore the biodiversity of the ecologically sensitive areas in the park and strengthen and build awareness on the importance of conservation.

ISSUES:

1.) Rationale for Selected Option

A. *Protect and restore the biodiversity of ecologically sensitive areas*

Strategy #1

The removal of invasive plants in Saxe Point Park is an important strategy to ensure that plants such as english ivy, himalayan blackberry and daphne do not over-populate and choke out the existing native vegetation.

It is recognized that the sheer volume of work associated with invasive plant removal in Saxe Point Park as well as our other natural areas, cannot be completed solely by staff and that the assistance of volunteers is required.

The Branch Out program was established in 2013 to engage the support of volunteers to assist with planned activities within our urban forest and natural areas. The success of the Branch Out program continues to grow as more volunteers get involved and become trained to assist with this monumental task. In addition, a paid partnership was initiated with the Greater Victoria Green Team to support and participate in planned natural area activities and to recruit additional volunteers to support this program. Each year we support more Branch Out events to help manage the invasive plants in our parks. For volunteers that are unable to participate in the planned Branch Out events, there is a self-guided invasive pull program. Sessions are held to orient volunteers on the safe and effective methods for removing invasive plants. A toolbox near the Saxe Gardener shed contains loppers, secateurs, tarps, eye protection, and a clipboard to log daily accomplishments. This program has become very successful as it enables volunteers to participate in pulling invasive plants year-round as their schedule permits.

Metrics

There is 51,415 square metres of forested area in Saxe Point Park. It is anticipated that each year we will *remove about 4,000 square metres of invasive plants* from the forest floor and tree trunks in Saxe Point Park. At this rate it will take approximately 15 years to complete a one-time sweep as we will need to back track to remove invasive plants from the newly planted trees and shrubs to support their establishment.

Strategy #2

The areas within the park that have the highest conservation values are the natural forested and coastal bluff zones. The flora is varied and characteristic of the mild, temperate maritime climate of the southern tip of Vancouver Island with its abundant rainfall. There are pockets of Garry oak meadows, rocky outcrops and coastal bluffs. Arbutus, grand fir, douglas fir, Garry oaks and western yew are typical in these areas. Understory includes ocean spray, snowberry, and ferns. The park is also home to four species at risk populations in the coastal bluff areas including: poverty clover, macoun's meadowfoam, footsteps of spring and coast microseris.

In order to keep the flora healthy and strong, a native planting program has been established to increase the biodiversity of our forests. The restoration of the existing forests in Saxe Point Park is

one of the best ways to capture CO₂, since trees pull carbon out of the air during photosynthesis, then store it in their trunks and roots. A new study has found that diverse natural forests with a mix of tree species are more reliable and stable at absorbing and storing carbon than forest stands dominated by just a few tree species, both over time and across diverse conditions.

Dead or hazardous trees are removed or modified that are in close proximity to targets such as residential properties, park buildings, parking lots, picnic areas and trails. Large woody debris from these removals are left on the forest floor to provide habitat and to provide nutrients to support reforestation.

Metrics

It is anticipated that we will plant about 1,000 native trees and shrubs in Saxe Point Park over the next five years to help regenerate vegetation in the sparse areas within the forest. The CRD is currently working with Esquimalt and other municipalities on a Request for Information to participate in a future tree planting grant called the 2 billion tree program.

Strategy #3

Another issue that arises from time to time is the creation of unauthorized trails within the forested areas of the park. When people and dogs access these natural areas, vegetation gets trampled, invasive plant seeds dispersed, soils compacted, and stormwater run-off issues can arise. In addition, sensitive habitat can get fragmented, if left unmanaged, decreasing the overall habitat for local fauna.

When unauthorized trails in the park are detected, staff strategize on how best to decommission the trail so that it does not inadvertently become a regular trail. De-commissioning strategies include the installation of protective fencing, signage, boulders, and logs. In addition, the planting of native trees and shrubs right on top of the unauthorized trails can help steer people away from these natural areas and keep them from inadvertently accessing these unauthorized trails.

Metrics

It is anticipated that we will install 50-100 linear metres of barrier over the next three years to help protect the highly sensitive areas within the park. As noted above, barriers can be in the form of fencing, native plants, and boulders.

B. Strengthen and build awareness on the importance of conservation

Strategy #4

The installation of a kiosk at the main parking lot has been initiated through a significant donation from Seaspan to provide visitors with valuable information about the park. This 2-sided sign will include information about the importance of protecting the ecologically sensitive areas, trail etiquette, a trail map with amenities, birds of prey facts, and responsible dog walking etiquette.

The trail map will identify the formalized recreational trails in the park and trail etiquette will outline the shared use of trails and will provide dog owners with information about dog owner responsibility such as cleaning up after your dog, keeping dogs under voice control and keeping dogs out of the natural areas and no dog zones. In addition, it will provide dog owners information about where dogs can run off leash and on leash. The trail map will also have important information about the amenities in the park and where they are located.

Stand-alone signs will also be installed and mounted on split rail fences to further raise awareness about the sensitive natural areas within the park and to remind park visitors to stay on the paths.

The threat of a forest fire is always present especially with extended periods of drought combined with higher seasonal temperatures. The installation of new no smoking signs will help to remind people not to smoke “anything” in our parks so that it reduces the risk of fire and makes it pleasant for everyone to enjoy a smoke free environment. Staff plan to cut the tall grass areas annually prior to August to reduce the chance of a wildfire.

Metrics

It is anticipated that each year we will draft and install at least 1 interpretive sign for Saxe Point Park over the next 3 years and involve indigenous peoples and other stakeholders.

Strategy #5

Another way that we can help build awareness of the importance of conservation of natural areas is by offering guided nature walks and providing visitors with valuable information about the local flora and fauna. Over time, this will elevate the overall appreciation of these natural areas.

Metrics

It is anticipated that each year we will lead 2 guided nature walks for up to 20 people in Saxe Point Park.

Strategy #6

The development of our website library is another strategy that will help build awareness of the importance of conservation of natural areas. Our library already includes great information about tree planting and tree care. Over the next 5 years, we will add educational information including natural area management best practices. These educational items would include information on the safe and effective methods for removing invasive plants.

Metrics

It is anticipated that each year we will continue to add natural area best management practices to the Branch Out website in the form of written documents and videos.

2. Organizational Implications

There are no organizational implications at this time.

3. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications at this time.

4. Sustainability & Environmental Implications

These active conservation and community-led biodiversity strategies are invaluable benefits for the Township's natural areas. Together, these initiatives work to protect biodiversity through a range of approaches including planning, monitoring, public education, restoration, and naturalization.

5. Communication & Engagement

A report was presented to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee in June 2021 and was endorsed for council review. The communication strategies outlined in this report will be initiated if this report is approved.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. That the natural area management plan strategies outlined in staff report P&R 21-004 be approved.
2. That Council provide alternative direction to staff.