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GVRD Public Involvement Division
4330 Kingsway
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(Submitted via e-mail to: gvrdd.communications@gvrdd.bc.ca)

Re: Feedback on the draft *Regional Parks and Greenways Plan*

Dear GVRD Parks,

The Recreational Canoeing Association of BC (RCABC) and the Whitewater Kayaking Association of BC (WKABC) are volunteer-based provincial organizations, representing paddlers and canoe and kayak clubs across the province. Together, the organizations cover the full range of paddling interests and skills: from ocean tripping to extreme whitewater, and from beginners to instructors.

In addition to instruction and safety standards, the provincial associations each have committees that address conservation and access issues. As the respective chairs of these environmental committees, we are happy to submit the following comments in response to the district's review of its draft *Regional Parks and Greenways Plan* (RPGP) as part of the Sustainable Region Initiative.

An RCABC representative attended the public meeting at Capilano College on April 21, and we have reviewed the draft RPGP. Based on that information, we are pleased to offer the GVRD our feedback. Also, we would be interested in remaining involved in any subsequent park or watershed planning that potentially affects water-based recreation.

Following a summary of our interests and the general nature of our input, we present feedback as requested on the GVRD's feedback forms: following the structure of Goal 1, Goal 2, Goal 3, and Other.

Paddling Interests

Because of its spectacular scenery, diversity of waterways, close proximity for both residents and visitors, and the array of complementary activities, the GVRD is well positioned to be a world-class destination for recreational paddling. In fact, several current editions (Spring 2005) of paddling magazines feature BC and Vancouver as destinations. Paddling, especially whitewater kayaking, is a fast-growing sport. In the past few years, the Pacific Northwest and BC have seen a dramatic increase in the interest in paddlesports. In Vancouver, and all around BC, this is evident in the numbers of paddling schools, paddling retailers and paddling events that continue to grow. For instance, in the past 2 years, 3 canoeing and kayaking stores have relocated and/or expanded to locate near the Seymour, Lynn and Capilano Rivers.

With the growth of paddling activities and the increased participation in water-based recreation, the provincial associations have been building their capacity to give a voice to recreational paddling and to build relationships with public agencies that manage our waterways. We consider that paddling interests and opportunities are presently under-represented in strategic plans such as the RPGP, and that agencies such as GVRD Parks and BC Parks have an obligation and an opportunity to work together, as well as working with the paddling associations and local clubs, in order to meet the needs of everyone involved and to gain the full benefits from the lake and river resources in the GVRD. The paddling community supports the 3 goals outlined in the RPGP, and can contribute to achieving each of them.

The Conservation and Access Committee of the RCABC and the River Impacts and Access Committee of the WKABC are working to raise awareness about paddling; and to ensure public access to put-ins and take-outs; offer advice on construction, utility, or habitat projects or recreation facilities that could impact paddling; create new opportunities for recreational paddling; and facilitate cooperation between agencies, paddlers, clubs and other stakeholders to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively to meet multiple goals and offer the best possible paddling experiences and opportunities.

Summary of Input

In general, the RPGP is somewhat confusing regarding the use of acronyms and references to related planning documents and advisory groups: the document would benefit from adding some graphics, tables and timelines that illustrate how these elements relate to each other. Also, it would be helpful if the high-level RPGP could specify the follow-up process for creating a system plan for GVRD Parks and on-the-ground park management plans.

While the goals and strategies of the RPGP are clear, it is not clear how GVRD Parks will balance these goals when they conflict. For example, under what circumstances will economic development supersede the protection of special features? Similarly, any specific details that GVRD Parks currently knows, such as priorities, activities, projects or policies at specific parks should be included in the RPGP wherever possible.

Finally, water-based recreation appears to be under-represented in the plan. As an example, the inventory of park facilities (Appendix 1) does not identify boat launches, water-based camping opportunities, or other facilities, and it does not make a distinction between self-propelled craft and motorized activities. We urge GVRD Parks to work closely with the Greater Vancouver Water District, BC Parks, municipalities, Water Survey Canada and other agencies to ensure that the values for paddling (whitewater and flatwater) are identified, and catalogued, and that the district and its paddling-related businesses are getting maximum value out the region's incredible waterways.

This new plan needs to include an inventory of recreational paddling and waterways. There are many waterways in the GVRD that are important to the recreational paddling community. Some of them have direct GVRD interest, such as GVRD Parks, along their shoreline. Those waterways that are not GVRD parks have other relationships to the GVRD and its partners, such as drinking water supply, municipal greenspace, roadways, stormwater overflow, salmon habitat, etc. We feel that the new GVRD Parks plan needs to:

- Recognize the waterways that are used by recreational paddlers;
- Consider how the use and quality of these waterways could be enhanced for recreational paddling;
- Determine the effect that GVRD-controlled services (such as drinking water supply, bridges, storm drains, habitat projects, etc.) have on the waterways; and,
- Identify the details of paddling routes, such as scenic quality, wilderness experience, quality of whitewater, ease of access, facilities, and suitability for instruction and/or guiding opportunities.

Feedback Specific to Goal 1 of the RPGP

Goal 1: Protect and enhance regional landscapes, biodiversity and heritage features.

Strategy #1: Secure and enhance regionally significant landscapes and critical habitats.

Strategy #2: Manage conservation lands and habitats to protect their biodiversity, environmental and cultural integrity.

Strategy #1: Secure and enhance regionally significant landscapes and critical habitats

We are supportive of efforts to both identify and preserve the reasons that people choose to either recreate here, or in the case of tourism, travel here to participate in activities based on the natural beauty of the area. For most paddlers, these values are key to the experience, whether that be the scenery of Deep Cove, or that of Seymour Canyon; both whitewater and flatwater paddlers appreciate the natural beauty of the area.

We suggest that the following are important factors in securing and enhancing landscapes:

- 1) Working with the user groups to identify which areas are significant for their activities, and how those areas are used, so as to be better able to understand the values within the GVRD as they relate to natural assets.
- 2) Reducing the impacts of industrial activities upon the natural resources (i.e., gravel operations on the Coquitlam River, blasting for fish passage in Seymour Canyon, or dry watercourses on the Capilano River) through increased integration with competing values.
- 3) Planning the use of areas so as to reduce the impacts of use by recreationists or tourists. This might include the designation of trails, access points, or camping spots, along with the appropriate infrastructure to handle the use of the areas in question.

Strategy #2: Manage conservation lands and habitats to protect their biodiversity, environmental and cultural integrity

Is “conservation lands” a term that has a special definition? If so, how are such lands identified?

We are supportive of efforts to identify and protect the natural and cultural values of the area, and to see that use of the area is promoted in a manner that preserves the opportunities and experiences for future visitors.

Feedback Specific to Goal 2 of the RPGP

Goal 2: Provide outdoor recreation opportunities and education programs, and foster community stewardship.

Strategy #1: Secure lands and provide and expand recreation facilities for outdoor experience.

Strategy #2: Manage, operate and maintain affordable and safe facilities for outdoor experiences.

Strategy #3: Coordinate planning and delivery of outdoor recreation programs and address resource management issues.

Strategy #4: Work with Community, ethnic and social organizations to expand recreation and wellness opportunities.

Strategy #5: Provide education programs that foster environmental stewardship, personal safety and social responsibility.

Strategy #1: Secure lands and provide and expand recreation facilities for outdoor experience

We would like to provide input on securing particular pieces of land on waterways for the purpose of facilitating in-stream use. Our input relates to:

- Designating access and egress points along waterways.
- Establishing campgrounds for overnight stays.
- Maintaining the inherent value of the on-water experience through appropriate use of the lands surrounding waterways.
- Installing facilities such as outhouses, changing rooms or other facilities that enhance paddling opportunities.

We have not included a complete inventory of specific locations, but would like to discuss these possibilities with the GVRD. The locations would include many of the waterways listed later in this document, as well as others.

Strategy #2: Manage, operate and maintain affordable and safe facilities for outdoor experiences

As responsible users of waterways, the paddling community would encourage development and maintenance of facilities that benefit waterways users and that enhance the opportunity to utilize the areas natural resources. While the facilities required for paddling-related activities are usually minimal, the opportunity for infrastructure that supports these activities exists, and might include some of the following:

- Docks;
- Improved trails, stairs or boardwalks;
- Signed put-ins and take-outs;
- The production of maps and brochures;
- Clubhouse facilities or boat storage facilities;
- Support facilities (washrooms, showers, etc.); and,
- Training facilities (such as slalom gates).

Strategy #3: Coordinate planning and delivery of outdoor recreation programs and address resource management issues

If appropriate, the WKABC and RCABC would like to be included in the Technical Outdoor Recreational Planning Committee.

The management of recreational resources by the GVRD has a large impact on recreational paddling, and the paddling associations would like to work closely with the GVRD on the following management issues, among others:

- Addressing the growing conflict between motorized and non-motorized use of waterways. This is becoming a greater problem in populated areas such as Indian Arm, False Creek, Burrard Inlet, English Bay and the larger lakes (Alouette, Pitt, Stave, etc.). The potential for motorized use on rivers needs to be considered as well, particularly on the Fraser, but future technology could bring motorized use to smaller rivers.
- Implementing a regional “Blueways” system on suitable waterways that enhances the area for kayaking and canoeing. Create facilities such as campsites for non-motorized craft in these areas. Good locations for non-motorized paddling routes or campsites are Indian Arm, Alouette Lake, Pitt Lake, Stave Lake, and the Fraser River, as examples.
- Managing drinking water resources to account for recreation values. In the Drinking Water Plan, there is no mention of the long history and popularity of recreational use of the GVRD's/GVWD's rivers, which is a gap in the philosophy of the SRI and integrated resource management, it is also inconsistent with the language of the RPGP. Paddlers would like to be included in future planning.
- Releasing water from reservoirs such as the Capilano, Seymour or Coquitlam could be planned. These releases could coincide with paddling events, which would likely be very popular, and there are many examples in North America (Puntledge River on Vancouver Island, Kananaskis River in Alberta) where this type of arrangement has contributed significantly to the paddling community, as well as to the local economy, and overall attraction of the area. Healthy forms of outdoor recreation such as river paddling should be given the same consideration as watering the lawn or washing the car!
- Coordinating work with stakeholder groups to enhance scenic value of rivers and restore rivers that have been urbanized and modified. Examples of rivers with great potential for restoration are the lower reaches of the Seymour, Lynn, Capilano Rivers and the Coquitlam River from the reservoir down.
- Communicating more openly with user groups. Each of the paddling associations would like to be notified of activities that affect the waterways they use, such as construction projects, access/parking issues, changes to facilities in parks, proposals by other stakeholder groups, and future planning processes.
- Ensuring that access to waterways is approved and maintained through the identification of areas that are used for recreational paddling.

The following is a partial list of rivers, lakes and ocean waterways that are used by recreational paddlers. Some of these waterways have extremely high value and others are only used occasionally. The GVRD should work with the paddling community to catalogue and classify these waterways, so as to maintain and enhance the opportunities and experiences that are currently available.

Rivers:

Capilano River
Lynn Creek
Seymour River
Coquitlam River
Alouette River
Nickomekle River
Serpentine River
Fraser River
Widgeon Creek
Kanaka Creek

Freshwater Lakes:

Burnaby Lake
Deer Lake
Bunzten Lake
Sasamat Lake
Alouette Lake
Pitt Lake
Stave Lake

Saltwater:

Indian Arm
Burrard Inlet, East and West
English Bay
False Creek
Spanish Banks
West Vancouver
Bowen Island

Many of these waterways would benefit from securing of lands and expansion of facilities. We are very interested in working with the GVRD and its partner agencies (BC Parks, BC Hydro, municipalities, First Nations, etc.) to determine the potential future of these valuable areas.

Strategy #4: Work with Community, ethnic and social organizations to expand recreation and wellness opportunities

Recreational paddling has created a community of people who enjoy social outdoor experiences, have healthy and active lifestyles and have a keen awareness of conservation. We wish to work with GVRD Parks to enhance these opportunities, and would like the GVRD to recognize, in its planning processes, the importance and contribution of recreational paddling to the building of a stronger and healthier community. The GVRD could:

- Work with paddling organizations to deliver training and programs for watersports education and fitness;
- Coordinate a more effective safety program and rescue response;
- Work with paddling organizations and businesses to develop and promote events (events such as the Capilano Slalom Race are examples of previous efforts, other events have been or are held on the Mamquam, Chilliwack and other rivers); and,
- Support the events of local paddling associations and clubs with available resources.

Strategy #5: Provide education programs that foster environmental stewardship, personal safety and social responsibility

The recreational paddling community has always played an important role in the stewardship of waterways, and in promoting safety and responsible use of the waterways; these items form a part of the mandates of the RCABC and WKABC. The GVRD could assist in fostering this stewardship by:

- Recognizing the important role of paddling organizations in providing relevant safety material, training, and in promoting recognized standards for leadership (instructors, guides, and other leaders);
- Supporting associations and clubs financially or with other resources the GVRD can offer;
- Creating links between recreation, water use, habitat conservation, parks, etc., that bring the recreational paddling community “into the loop” of the SRI.

Paddlers are often very knowledgeable of river, lake and ocean environments, because they often spend much of their time on the water. This experience can be valuable when the GVRD or other agencies or stakeholders undertake projects that affect waterways.

Feedback Specific to Goal 3 of the RPGP

Goal #3: Support economic development and quality of life in the region.

- Strategy #1: Partner with businesses and other organizations to provide enhanced services for visitors.*
- Strategy #2: Improve health, wellness and the social well being of residents and reduce those costs through programming, recreation opportunities and partnerships*
- Strategy #3: Maintain and operate parks and greenways to a standard that promotes wellness, livability and biodiversity, which will enhance real estate values, attract employees and businesses and makes the region more competitive.*

Strategy #1: Partner with businesses and other organizations to provide enhanced services for visitors

The paddling associations, member clubs, and supporting member commercial operators believe there are many opportunities to enhance the use of the current facilities and existing natural areas. As well, we believe there are many other opportunities to enhance and develop new partnerships to provide increased access to water-related activities in the GVRD.

These partnerships could include items such as trail or access maintenance, public safety and awareness programs, instruction programs, paddlesports events, and a wide variety of cooperative efforts to promote water-based activities in a safe and responsible manner. On-water facilities or support infrastructure such as clubhouses or boat storage provide centers for meeting, training, education, school programs, and other opportunities.

The North Shore provides for the possibility of unparalleled opportunity, found in no other major city. With spectacular rivers running through the city, the potential for tourism and recreation in this area is immense. We believe that the knowledge that the paddling associations possess is of great value, and with cooperative efforts the potential for new tourism activities, enhanced recreation opportunities, and potential new business opportunities are very real.

Strategy #2: Improve health, wellness and the social well being of residents and reduce those costs through programming, recreation opportunities and partnerships

As experts on all of aspects of paddlesports, the paddling community has the knowledge to help support programs that would otherwise be onerous for the GVRD to provide. By partnering on these efforts, the paddling community can enhance the capacity of the GVRD to deliver programs, and to provide opportunities. We believe that the benefits of outdoor recreation go beyond the physical, to include increased social awareness and environmental responsibility.

As the entire breadth of the values associated with paddlesports are a part of the mandate of the paddling associations, we would look forward to working to enhance any opportunities that exist, and on developing new ones.

Strategy #3: Maintain and operate parks and greenways to a standard that promotes wellness, livability and biodiversity, which will enhance real estate values, attract employees and businesses and makes the region more competitive

As with most of the comments we have provided, we believe that increased opportunities for any activity, particularly outdoor ones, contribute to the attraction of an area, be it for recreation or for tourism. Along with those attractions comes the opportunity for businesses related to those activities.

The key natural values found within the GVRD are an incredible resource, and one that is not currently developed as it might be, particularly with respect to water-related activities. Through coordinated management of the existing resources, we suggest that the GVRD can offer water-based recreation opportunities with which no other cities are able to compete, and, therefore, to provide experiences and offer lifestyles that are not found elsewhere.

Other Feedback

The paddling community would like to collaborate with the GVWD, Environment Canada's Water Survey and others to update the river gauge system to include the Capilano River, Lynn Creek and Seymour River. The private Capilano web camera illustrates the benefits that such information provides in terms of informing in-stream users of water conditions. This real-time information on the rivers allows the use of the rivers to be maximized, and creates a safer resource.

Conclusion

On behalf of the RCABC, the WKABC and all the members we represent, thank you for this opportunity to provide input to the RPGP. We hope that our comments help to strengthen the plan and the on-going planning processes. We look forward to working with GVRD Parks and its partners to help develop more detailed park management plans in the future.

Sincerely,

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Roger Warnatsch

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