

Project Overview

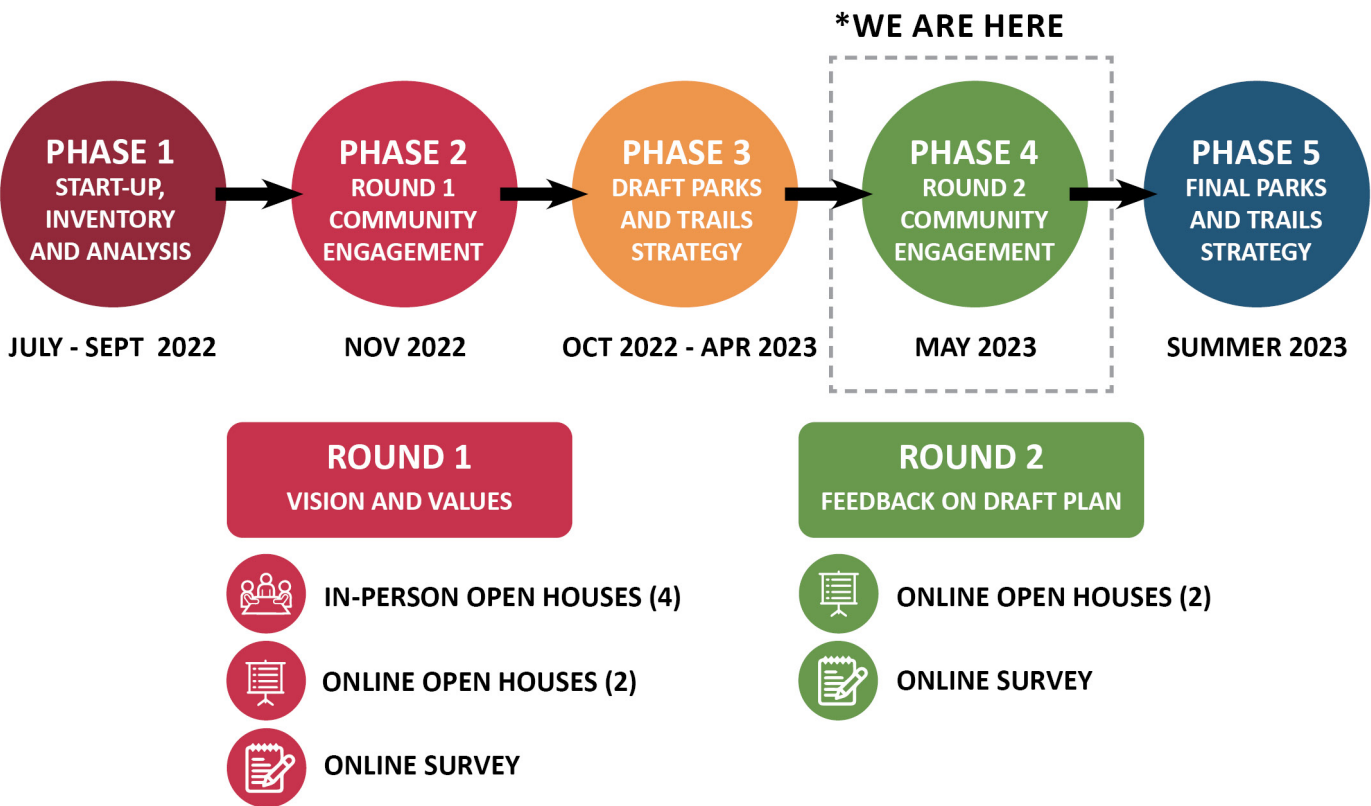
The qathet Regional District is developing a **Parks and Trails Strategy** to guide the future direction for parks and trails owned and operated by the qRD.

In-person and online community engagement sessions were held in November 2022. The feedback and public priorities identified in these sessions are helping to shape the Draft Parks and Trails Strategy.

A **second round of community engagement**, currently underway, will further gather feedback on the vision, goals and recommendations for the Draft Strategy.

The Parks and Trails Strategy will:

- Present a comprehensive inventory of current parks and trails
- Identify community values and priorities
- Identify key issues, challenges and opportunities
- Establish goals and highlight actions that reflect the community’s desires and aspirations for our parks and trails
- Identify priorities, guide decision-making and operations, and allocate resources over the next ten years
- Include a policy for parkland acquisition



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN ROUND 2:

Your input is essential! We need your help to ensure the Draft Strategy reflects our region’s needs and aspirations for regional parks and beach access trails.

Please share your thoughts by participating in our online survey by **May 31, 2023**.

What We Heard

WHAT WE DID

- 4 in-person workshops
- 2 online workshops
- 1 online survey from Nov. 14-30, 2022

PARTICIPATION

- 370 online survey responses
- 99 participants in community open houses
- 17 community members provided email feedback

COMMUNITY VALUES

WATER ACCESS

Access to the waterfront, especially through public beach access trails.

CONNECT TO NATURE

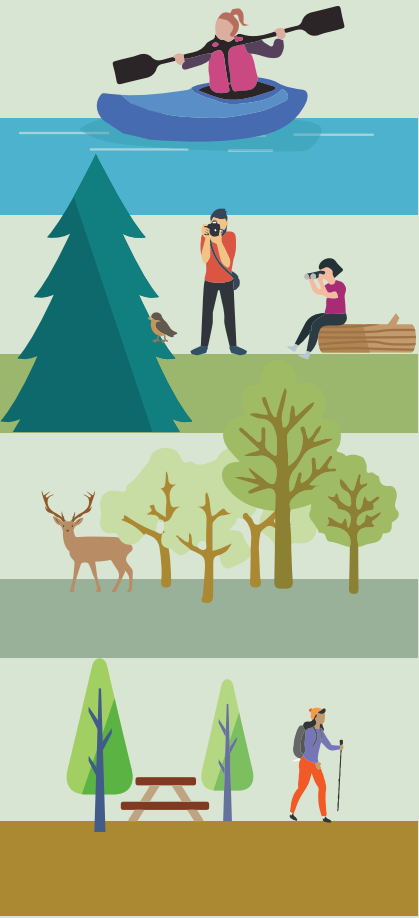
Importance of parks and trails for providing opportunities to connect with nature.

PROTECT NATURE

Protecting nature in regional parks and trails through conservation and by preserving biodiversity.

RECREATION

Importance of access to recreation opportunities such as walking, hiking, swimming, and picnicking.



KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

DESIRE FOR NEW PARKS AND TRAILS

Open house attendees indicated that they are supportive of increasing funding for parks and trails and expanding the number of new parks and trails. Survey respondents were also slightly in favour of acquiring new parks over maintaining existing parks. Stillwater Bluffs was the top mentioned location for a new park or trail.

CONTINUED ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

There was strong support for improving accessibility for those with mobility challenges including additional washrooms, the accessibility and maintenance of trails, more accessible parking, and increased signage at parks and trails.

SAFE TRAIL CONNECTIONS AND ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

A key theme from the open houses was the desire for trail connections between communities and support for more opportunities for active transportation.

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

The importance of volunteers for maintaining parks and trails within the qRD emerged as a key theme across the engagement process. There was also recognition of the need for the qRD to provide support to volunteers through funding.



Vision and Goals

The Vision provides a unified approach for the qRD’s parks and trails system and reflects what we heard from stakeholders and the public during the first round of engagement.

The parks and trails system preserves natural spaces, and connects people to the waterfront, rich ecosystems, beaches, and each other. Supported by community partnerships, regional parks and trails provide diverse opportunities for relaxation and recreation that support health and wellness for all.

GOALS

Five goals emerged to support the qRD in achieving the vision for parks and trails. Each goal is supported by specific recommendations to be accomplished over the next 10 years.

GOAL 1: Identify, acquire, and manage new regional parks and trails

GOAL 2: Increase protection and management of natural areas

GOAL 3: Strengthen community partnerships and volunteer resources

GOAL 4: Enhance the user experience at parks and beach access trails

GOAL 5: Support active transportation and a connected community



GOAL 1

Identify, acquire, and manage new regional parks and trails

RECOMMENDATION 1.1:

Set a target to maintain the current level of service for parks and trails as the population increases. To meet the needs of the additional 3,000 people projected to move to the region by 2041, the qRD would need to add 45.4 hectares of parkland to maintain current service levels.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2:

Adopt a *Parkland Acquisition Policy* to guide decisions on acquisition of regionally significant parkland.

Prioritize the acquisition of:

- Sites with unique/significant landscape features
- Sites with sensitive ecosystems/high levels of biodiversity
- Sites that contain species at risk
- Sites that have key habitats/wildlife corridors
- Sites with high cultural, historic, or heritage value
- Sites that are connected to other parks and trails
- Sites with high education/research value
- Sites that are accessible
- Sites that are complementary to the parks system
- Sites in areas with little existing parkland
- Sites that are highly valued by the community
- Sites that are in threat from development

- Sites with partnership opportunities with other qRD planning and conservation initiatives
- Sites that are available for acquisition
- Sites that can be reasonably managed by the qRD
- Larger sites
- Sites that have high climate change mitigation potential
- Sites that are complementary to planning initiatives

RECOMMENDATION 1.3:

Increase public access to the waterfront by acquiring and developing additional beach access trails.

Prioritize the acquisition of beach access trails:

- In sites where waterfront access is limited
- To sites that are well-used
- To sites with high recreational value
- To sites with high wildlife viewing potential
- That could reasonably be maintained by the qRD
- That could easily be made accessible
- That could accommodate support amenities such as parking or washrooms
- On right-of-ways with good roads, no gates or development



GOAL 2

Increase protection and management of natural areas

RECOMMENDATION 2.1:

Create park management plans to determine the type, location, uses, and activities appropriate within regional parks to protect important habitat and ecosystems, and cultural features. Review existing ecological data and sensitive ecosystem inventories and determine if additional information or studies are needed to identify natural areas to be protected in each regional park. Consider working with organizations like the Coastal Partners in Conservation Society to carry-out inventories and field studies.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2:

Collaborate with community groups and environmental organizations, agencies, and land managers to support the restoration and enhancement of fragmented habitats and ecosystems within regional parks. Currently, volunteers help with ecological restoration, invasive plant removal, trail maintenance, and garbage clean-ups. Organizations like the Coastal Partners in Conservation Society could also support habitat restoration projects.



GOAL 3

Strengthen community partnerships and volunteer resources

RECOMMENDATION 3.1:

Continue to work with First Nations communities, other levels of government, community groups, non-profit agencies, private landowners, land trusts, and Crown land tenure holders to maintain and expand land use agreements and acquire additional parkland for recreation and conservation.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2:

Support the Parks, Properties and Trails Volunteer program to increase volunteering opportunities and support community organizations in assisting and contributing to regional parks, properties, and trails projects including ecological restoration, trail maintenance.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3:

Collaborate with Tla’amin, shíshálh, Klahoose, Nanoose, Homalco, and K’ómoks First Nations to incorporate cultural information at regional parks and explore opportunities to protect and learn from culturally significant sites.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4:

Support community groups in their efforts to seek authorization for backcountry trails on Provincial land.



GOAL 4

Enhance the user experience at parks and beach access trails

RECOMMENDATION 4.1:

Develop a monitoring system to understand current levels of service and determine emerging needs. This will ensure parks and beach access trails are safe, well-maintained, and that appropriate resources and budget are allocated to maintenance.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2:

Assess regional parks to identify barriers to access and opportunities to provide improved accessibility for all ages and abilities. Ensure parking lots, washrooms, and at least a portion of each picnic area in regional parks is fully accessible. Aim to provide at least one pathway or trail that is accessible at each regional park.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3:

Ensure that the qRD provides information about the visitor experience at parks including the availability of accessible parking, washrooms, and trails. An online resource or informational pamphlet could be created to identify barrier-free amenities and access points across the qRD.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4:

Ensure all regional parks and beach access trails are identified with signage. Popular trails in the region should have signage indicating land ownership and trail etiquette to ensure the safety of users.

RECOMMENDATION 4.5:

Identify opportunities to incorporate more support amenities such as washrooms, signage, and parking at select regional parks and beach access trails. Prioritize adding amenities to parks in underserved areas identified through the gap analysis.



GOAL 5

Support active transportation and a connected community

RECOMMENDATION 5.1:

Determine the feasibility of creating regional active transportation corridors to connect regional parks and communities.

The community expressed interest in having active transportation corridors in various locations across the qRD including:

- Electoral Areas B and C: Connecting Saltery Bay to City of Powell River;
- Electoral Area D: Connecting Van Anda and Gilles Bay, and
- Electoral Area E: Across Lasqueti Island.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2:

Coordinate with other jurisdictions, First Nations, land managers, and landowners to identify partnership opportunities for active transportation initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 5.3:

Develop an active transportation corridor implementation plan that identifies:

- Priority ratings;
- Estimated costs;
- Jurisdictional/land ownership concerns;
- Grant and other funding opportunities; and/or
- Design considerations/standards.

