

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) is home to an extraordinary network of parks, trails, shorelines, rivers, lakes, and natural areas that contribute to the region's quality of life, environmental health, and outdoor recreation opportunities. These places connect residents and visitors to nature, support active lifestyles, protect important ecological and cultural values, and strengthen communities across the region. The Parks, Trails, and Water Access Strategy provides a long-term roadmap to guide the planning, management, stewardship, and sustainable growth of the RDCK's regional parks, trails, and water access system over the coming decades. Developed through extensive research, site assessments, stakeholder engagement, Indigenous outreach, public consultation, and collaboration with the Board of Directors and staff, the Strategy establishes a shared vision and clear direction for the future.



What We Heard

Throughout the engagement process, residents consistently expressed strong support for protecting natural areas while improving access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Key themes included:

- Improving and protecting public water access.
- Expanding and connecting regional trail networks.
- Conserving environmentally sensitive areas and important landscapes.
- Enhancing accessibility and inclusion.
- Supporting recreation opportunities close to home.
- Strengthening stewardship, partnerships, and volunteer involvement.
- Improving long-term planning, maintenance, and investment in regional assets.

Strategy Process

Developed through extensive research, site assessments, stakeholder engagement, Indigenous outreach, public consultation, and collaboration with the Board of Directors and staff, the Strategy establishes a shared vision and clear direction for the future.








Vision

The RDCK has a vibrant and resilient system of regional parks, trails, and water access sites where people and communities connect, play, and thrive through nature. These spaces provide inclusive and accessible opportunities for recreation, foster a strong sense of belonging and connection to place, and reflect the diverse and evolving needs of the region. Through thoughtful stewardship, meaningful partnerships, and responsible service delivery, RDCK parks, trails, and water access protect cultural and ecological values while supporting community well-being and long-term environmental resilience.

Strategic Directions

The Strategy is organized around six interconnected goals:

- 
Provide Outstanding Nature-Based Recreation Opportunities
 Enhance the quality, diversity, and sustainability of outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting the character and values that make the region unique.
- 
Enhance Access to Regional Parks and Trails
 Improve connectivity, accessibility, and opportunities for residents and visitors to experience nature and outdoor recreation.
- 
Advance Inclusion, Equity, and Welcoming Experiences Across Regional Parks and Trails
 Support recreation opportunities that are welcoming, accessible, and inclusive for people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and identities.
- 
Protect and Steward Regionally Significant Natural and Cultural Areas
 Conserve important ecological, cultural, and heritage values while supporting responsible recreation and environmental stewardship.
- 
Strengthen Community and Regional Partnerships
 Build collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities, local governments, stewardship organizations, trail associations, volunteers, community groups, and other partners.
- 
Ensure Operational Excellence and Fiscal Responsibility
 Improve governance, asset management, service delivery, planning processes, and decision-making tools to ensure the long-term sustainability of the regional system.

Looking Ahead

The Parks, Trails, and Water Access Strategy recognizes that the region's parks, trails, and water access areas are among its most valued public assets. Implementing the Strategy will require collaboration, investment, stewardship, and ongoing engagement with communities and partners across the region.

By taking a balanced approach that integrates recreation, conservation, accessibility, partnerships, and responsible asset management, the RDCK can continue to provide meaningful outdoor experiences while protecting the natural and cultural landscapes that define the Central Kootenay region for future generations.

The RDCK Regional Parks Program operates within a dynamic environment, where community needs, environmental conditions, and funding opportunities continue to evolve. As such, responding to the recommendations in this strategy will be imperative, responsive, and aligned with ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

ROADMAP FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

The following table identifies the priorities required to implement the recommendations in this strategy. Activities and initiatives are organized by strategic focus area and aligned with the goals outlined in the strategy.



Image Source: RDCK



Parks, Trails and Water Access Development

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Improve and formalize access at priority water access sites.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Moderate (site upgrades, infrastructure).	Project-based delivery with partners.
Develop and apply a water access classification and prioritization framework.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Moderate (planning, mapping, stakeholder engagement; potential consultant support).	Integrated planning and technical analysis.
Develop and adopt a Regional Trails Framework that maps existing routes, identifies priority connections, integrates tourism opportunities, and establishes design and maintenance standards.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Moderate (planning, mapping, stakeholder engagement; potential consultant support).	Partnership-based planning with municipalities, First Nations, and trail organizations; supported by technical analysis.
Enhance trail connectivity and address priority gaps in the network.		Medium-Term (5–10 years)	High	Moderate–High (capital development).	Partnership-based delivery.
Undertake site improvements aligned with Level of Service classifications.		Ongoing	Medium	Moderate–High (capital + lifecycle investment).	Phased capital improvements.
Assess and address gaps in parks, trails, and water access distribution across sub-regions.		Medium-Term (5–10 years)	High	Low (analysis) leading to Moderate–High (future capital).	System-level planning and analysis.



Land Acquisition and System Expansion

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Adopt the strategic approach to land acquisition aligned with system priorities outlined in this Strategy.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Low–Moderate (planning and strategy development).	Internal coordination and partnerships.
Pursue acquisition and tenure opportunities to expand parks, trails, and water access areas.		Ongoing	High	High (land acquisition; partnership funding required).	Partnerships with First Nations, NGOs, and agencies.
Identify and secure new water access opportunities in priority areas.		Medium-Term (5–10 years)	High	Moderate–High (land, tenure, site development).	Partnership-based acquisition and tenure strategies.

Conservation and Stewardship

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Protect environmentally sensitive areas through classification and management approaches.		Immediate (0–2 years)	High	Low.	Integrated into planning and operations.
Implement restoration and stewardship initiatives in priority areas.		Ongoing	Medium	Low–Moderate (partnership-driven).	Partnerships with stewardship organizations.



Visitor Experience and Education

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Evaluate signage, wayfinding, and information across the system.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	Medium	Moderate (signage and design updates).	Coordinated program delivery.
Expand education and stewardship messaging to support appropriate use.		Ongoing	Medium	Low.	Partnerships and communications.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Evaluate signage, wayfinding, and information across the system.		Ongoing	High	Low (relationship-based).	Government-to-government collaboration.
Expand education and stewardship messaging to support appropriate use.		Ongoing	High	Low.	Ongoing engagement and agreements.



Governance and Service Framework

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Undertake a detailed service delivery and governance review to evaluate options for implementing Regional and Sub- Regional Park, trail, and water access services, including funding and taxation models.		Immediate (0–2 years)	High	Moderate (analysis, financial and legal review; potential consultant support).	Internal process supported by external expertise in governance, finance, and service delivery models.
Engage with Electoral Areas, municipalities, and First Nations to explore service delivery options, funding approaches, and implications for equitable access across the region.		Immediate (0–2 years)	High	Moderate (engagement, facilitation, communications, potential consultant support).	Internal process supported by external expertise in governance, finance, and service delivery models, facilitated engagement (potential use of third-party facilitators).
Based on findings and engagement, refine and adopt a service framework/definition, including classification and funding/taxation approach, to support long-term implementation of the parks, trails, and water access system.		Immediate (0–2 years)	High	Low–Moderate (policy development; potential implementation costs).	Board decision-making supported by staff recommendations, technical analysis, and policy development.
Apply classification and Level of Service framework across all existing assets as outlined in this strategy.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Low–Moderate (technical review, data support).	System-wide review and technical analysis.
Integrate Level of Service framework into operations, budgeting, and capital planning.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Low (integration with existing processes).	Integration with asset management and financial planning.
Establish consistent decision-making processes for planning, investment, and management.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Low.	Internal coordination and Board direction.



Planning and Asset Management

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Update and maintain a comprehensive asset inventory and condition assessment program.		Immediate (0–2 years)	High	Moderate (systems, data, potential consultant support).	Internal coordination supported by technical tools.
Prioritize and update management plans for high-use and high-value sites.		Short-Term (1–5 years)	High	Moderate–High (consultant and staff resources).	Combination of internal work and consultant support.
Integrate asset management practices into long-term financial planning.		Medium-Term (5–10 years)	High	Low.	Alignment with RDCK financial processes.

Funding and Sustainability

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Explore and implement sustainable funding approaches, including grants and user-based revenue where appropriate.		Medium-Term (5–10 years)	Medium	Low (strategy) with potential revenue generation.	Internal coordination and external funding.
Align capital and operational investment with system priorities and Level of Service.		Ongoing	High	Low (planning) guiding Moderate–High future investment.	Budgeting and financial planning processes.



Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Actions	Goals	Timeframe:	Priority	Costs/Funding Implications:	Delivery Approach:
Implement and operationalize the monitoring framework, including indicators and thresholds.		Immediate (0–2 years)	High	Moderate (program development, tools).	Integration with operations and planning.
Use monitoring and data to inform adaptive management and investment decisions.		Ongoing	High	Low.	Ongoing evaluation and decision-making.
Report on progress and adjust implementation priorities as needed.		Ongoing	High	Low.	Annual and periodic review.