Protecting and preserving our environment for future generations is crucial, and there is room for improvement in all of the areas where the RDN has measured the state of our environmental sustainability. Some ways this could be achieved are:

- Reducing personal water consumption;
- Reducing the emissions from industry, motor vehicles and burning that contribute to air pollution;
- Maintaining lands used for natural resource activities such as forestry and agriculture;
- Maintaining and protecting ecologically sensitive features such as rivers, streams and lakes;
- Reducing the per person consumption of energy and increasing the amount of energy available from renewable sources;
- Creating communities where walking and cycling are realistic transportation options;
- Reducing the amount of waste generated, increasing the amount of waste diverted from the landfill, and increasing the amount of waste recycled.

**Graph on waste reduced/reused**

Total Amount of Waste Disposed, Recycled and Reduced/Reused in the RDN (1998-2004)
The total amount of waste reduced and/or reused increased by 75 per cent, from 5,376 tonnes in 1998 to 9,398 tonnes in 2004.
ENVIRONMENTAL CAPITAL CHARACTERISTICS

Is there a safe, sufficient supply of water?
Indicators suggest we are consuming more water per capita and that we are not sure of our future supplies. This suggests a move away from sustainability. Groundwater studies have been initiated to better identify aquifers and determine risks to supply. Water quality is normally within drinking water guidelines, but more work is needed to improve the availability of test results.

Are important ecosystems and ecological features protected, healthy and productive?
Currently, there are no means of measuring the health and productivity of ecosystems, although there are opportunities for the RDN to work with federal and provincial governments in the future on suitable procedures. The regional district and its members have identified some of the most sensitive ecological features and steps are being taken to ensure that these areas are protected. More monitoring is needed.

Is the air clean and safe to breathe?
The two air pollutants that pose the greatest risk to people are ground level ozone and fine particulate matter. A single monitoring station in Nanaimo shows the air quality meets the Canada wide standards most of the time. More wide-spread monitoring would provide better information for the region as a whole.

Are natural resources being conserved and will renewable resources be available in perpetuity?
Generally, indicators show that we are not doing a good job of using our natural forest resources in a sustainable manner. However, the indicators show that we are retaining our important agricultural land (ALR), and are moving towards more sustainable farming practices.

Are we reducing our energy requirements, minimizing impacts on the environment and minimizing greenhouse gases?
Indicators show that we are using more energy per person than in the past, and continue to rely on the automobile for transportation. However, trends towards greater sustainability can be seen as more people are using public transportation and more people are living within walking distance of amenities.

Are we using our land and resources efficiently?
According to the indicators the results are mixed. Population density is much higher in the urban area but population growth is higher in the rural areas and there is still a significant amount of development potential in the rural areas.

Are we minimizing waste and using environmentally sound methods of waste disposal?
One area where the RDN already shines is in reducing the amount of waste going to the landfills. The Zero Waste initiative has allowed the RDN to divert a significant amount of waste from regional landfills, and commercial and household organics diversion programs are allowing the RDN to further reduce impacts on the environment. As well, the RDN has ceased shipping waste to the Cache Creek facility and now manages all waste locally, a more sustainable practice.

INDICATOR: WATER CONSUMPTION IN THE RDN
Although the data from 2003 to 2004 indicate a slight decrease in water consumption, the trend since 2001 indicates an overall increase in water consumption. In addition, the RDN remains well above the province’s per capita water consumption average. The rate of increasing consumption is greater than the increasing population, which implies that people are consuming more water.

INDICATOR: CONSUMPTION OF ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL GAS
The regional consumption of electricity and natural gas is rising over time and there is no energy manufactured in the region. The increase in consumption is attributed to personal consumption as well as population growth. Several factors influence the amount of electricity and natural gas consumed including the weather and economic growth. However, conservation measures combined with eco-efficient products will help curb the region’s increasing consumption of energy resources. Due to the lack of comparative electricity and natural gas data, it is not possible to accurately assess the indicator’s sustainability, although the consistent increase in electricity and natural gas use (between 2003 and 2004 only) indicate that the region is moving away from sustainability.