SECTION 3 – NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 AGRICULTURE

Existing productive farming areas and most of the undeveloped lands with some agricultural capability within Area ‘H’ are designated Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). Lands within the ALR are subject to the Agricultural Land Commission Act. The mandate of the Land Commission is to ensure the future productivity of lands within the ALR. Non-agricultural development, including subdivision or non-farm use of these lands are not permitted without Land Commission approval. Therefore, lands designated in the ALR should be retained for resource management purposes.

While regulations governing the ALR largely ensure that the land base is protected, problems may still develop at the interface between urbanizing areas and agricultural communities. The Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act ensures that bona fide agricultural operations, operating under normal farm practices, cannot be limited through zoning bylaws. This OCP supports agriculture and provides buffer lands (designated Rural Lands) to enhance land use compatibility in the Plan Area.

Objectives

1. Protect the agricultural land resources of the Plan Area for present and future food production.
2. Recognize and protect the needs and activities of agricultural operations when considering residential uses on adjacent lands and vice versa.
3. Advocate comprehensive resource management decisions where agricultural land is competing with forestry or environmental protection objectives.
4. Encourage sustainable farming methods in order to protect water resources and adjacent properties.
5. Ensure that the quantity and quality of the water supply is protected and seek ways and means of improving water availability for irrigation purposes.
6. Direct development that is compatible with the Community Values and Development Guideline Criteria Statements.

Policies

1. The Regional District supports the BC Agricultural Land Commission’s mandate of preserving and encouraging the use of land for agriculture. The Regional District Board may consider support of the use of agricultural land for non-farm purposes provided that the BC Agricultural Land Commission approves the non-farm use and the use is compatible with surrounding land use patterns and the environment.
2. The Regional District will encourage the retention of large land holdings within the ALR to maintain future opportunities for farm use.
3. The Regional District shall discourage encroachment and fragmentation of farmland by non-farm related uses.
4. The location and construction of new roads, utility or communication rights-of-way should be sited to avoid ALR lands wherever possible. Where unavoidable, these rights-
of-way should be sited in a manner that will cause minimal impact on agricultural operations. Alignments should be established in consultation with affected landowners and the BC Agricultural Land Commission.

5. The owners of land adjacent to ALR lands will be encouraged to provide a vegetative buffer between their lands and the ALR lands.

3.2 Forestry

Forestry is the most dominant land use in the Plan Area. Forestry resources cover approximately 75% of the land base. Although most of the forest land within the Plan Area is private holdings, there are also large areas of Provincial Forest owned by the Crown. Most of these lands are concentrated between Qualicum Bay and Deep Bay and in the lowland areas of the Plan Area.

The Provincial Forest includes an active seed orchard in District Lot 86, Newcastle Land District, which contributes to the management of the Crown Forest land base. There are also a significant number of Crown parcels, which were originally part of the Vancouver Island Fruit Lands that may have both forestry and agricultural potential.

Although most of the first growth forests in the Plan Area have long since been harvested, second growth forests are now in various stages of maturity. This Plan supports the protection of forest lands for silviculture in the same manner as agricultural lands are protected for agriculture. Where policies in this section relate to matters beyond the jurisdiction of the Regional District of Nanaimo, they serve only as broad objectives to help guide senior governments and private forest landowners in decisions for the management of forest lands.

Objectives

1. **Ensure** the Area's forest lands are managed on a sustained yield basis and are protected against activities that may disrupt their renewable resource potential.
2. **Support** sustainable forestry practices.
3. **Support** the Area's forest lands availability for recreational enjoyment and education.
4. **Encourage** best practice interface forest fire mitigation techniques for building and landscaping to protect life, property and the environment.
5. **Direct** development that is compatible with the Community Values and Development Guideline Criteria Statements.

Policies

1. This Plan supports the use of Resource Lands for forestry related uses where appropriately zoned. In addition, the Plan supports the use of Resource Lands for recreational activities (such as hiking trails), where such uses do not contribute to the degradation of the local environment (land and water quantity and quality) and are permitted by the landowner.

2. The Province and private forest land owners shall be encouraged to manage their forest lands so that they do not:
   a) Pose a threat to the quantity and quality of fresh water within the drainage system of watercourses, streams, lakes or wetlands;
   b) Alter the aesthetic appeal and visual integrity of the Plan Area;
   c) Disturb areas of unique vegetation or wildlife; and
d) Increase, or contribute to, soil erosion.

3. The Ministry of Forests and commercial forest companies shall be encouraged to ensure the sustainability of outdoor recreation exists in the natural woodlands of this area in conjunction with the management of the forest. This would include supporting the controlled use of private logging roads and areas during non-operational periods for public recreational use where possible, except in times of high or extreme fire hazard.

4. The Regional District will encourage Provincial leadership towards ensuring environmentally sound forestry practices on private forest land. The Ministry of Forests, commercial forest companies and private forest landowners will be encouraged to use best practice interface fire mitigation techniques.

**MINERAL, GRAVEL & HYDROCARBON RESOURCES**

The predominant known mineral resource within the Plan Area is gravel concentrations around Horne Lake, Spider Lake, and Nile Creek. Other potential resources include deposits of limestone and clay. It is important to note that aggregate resources such as sand and gravel have greater value in mineral production than metallic metals and hydrocarbon resources in the Plan Area. As other areas become depleted of this resource or are lost to development, there will be increasing pressure for access to aggregates in the Plan Area. The Regional District has only limited influence on the management of mineral, aggregate, and hydrocarbon resources as decisions related to such uses are generally beyond the jurisdiction of the Regional Board. The objectives and policies of this section remain broad in nature to offer guidance to senior governments in their decision-making process, as part of the referral process.

**Objectives**

1. **Protect** lands underlain by gravel, sand, mineral or hydrocarbon resources from surface developments, which would render them inaccessible.

2. **Minimize** conflicts between extraction activities and adjacent land and water uses.

3. **Support** good conservation practices during mining operations so as not to prejudice the long-term renewable resource potential of the area.

4. **Encourage** site rehabilitation and reclamation of damaged landscapes for subsequent productive use and environmental protection.

5. **Direct** development that is compatible with the Community Values and Development Guideline Criteria Statements.

**Policies**

1. Prior to allowing development in an area underlain by mineral resources, the feasibility of removing the resource should be adequately considered by the province and the Regional District.

2. The Province will be encouraged to provide adequate consideration to possible impacts on neighbouring residential and/or rural parcels and the natural environment prior to issuing a permit considering a new mining operation or re-opening an old mine (or pit). Particular attention should be focused on assessing the potential impacts of resource removal on the quantity or quality of surface and groundwater or social impact on neighbouring residences.
This information should be referred to the Regional District and adjoining landowners for comment prior to a decision.

3. The Regional District will recommend that environmentally sound reclamation and conservation practices be undertaken at all mineral and aggregate resource extraction operations to protect long-term resource potential in the Plan Area. Specifically, where a mine or earthworks may cause significant disturbance to the surface of the land, the Province shall be encouraged to require that a performance bond be posted to ensure the proper reclamation of the damaged landscape (this reclamation is controlled by Part 10 of the Mines Act, Health, Safety and Reclamation Code).