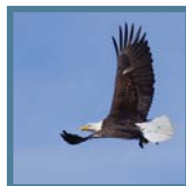


Regional Park Acquisition Criteria & Rating Framework



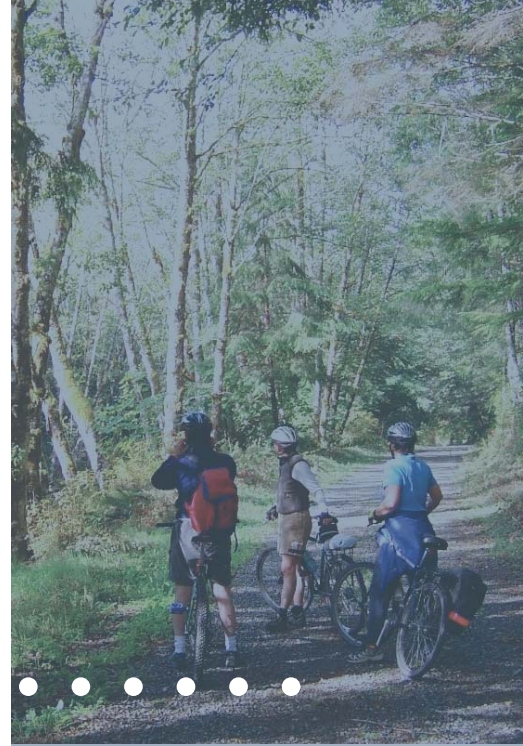
A Study for the
Regional District of Nanaimo
Recreation & Parks Department

FINAL REPORT 17 JUNE 2009



HB LANARC

PLANNING DESIGN SUSTAINABILITY



Acknowledgements

The authors extend thanks to Tom Osborne and Wendy Marshall (RDN Recreation and Parks Dept.) for their oversight and contributions to this project.

Harriet Rueggeberg, Land use/Environmental Planner
Kelsey Cramer, Student Intern
HB Lanarc Consultants Ltd.

A Proposed
REGIONAL PARK ACQUISITION
CRITERIA AND RATING FRAMEWORK
For the Regional District of Nanaimo

17 June 2009

Acknowledgements

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Objectives.....	2
2. Methods	2
3. Results.....	3
3.1 Review of Acquisition Criteria from Elsewhere	3
3.2 Proposed Acquisition Criteria	3
3.3 Proposed Rating System.....	8
3.4 Test Case	11
4. Assessing “Regional Significance”	12
4.1 Existing Municipal Parks.....	12
4.2 Potential Park Sites within Municipalities	12
4.3 Summary – Using the Criteria and Rating Framework	13
5. Study Conclusions and Recommendations	14
6. References	15
Table 1: Proposed Criteria for Regional Park Acquisition	4
Table 2: Park land acquisition criteria use by other agencies.....	7
Table 3: Proposed Ratings for Acquisition Criteria.....	8

Appendix 1: Regional Parks Acquisition Criteria and Rating Framework Score Sheet

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Regional Parks & Trails Plan 2005-2015 (RPTP) for the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) is to secure for all time a system of regional parks and trails that:

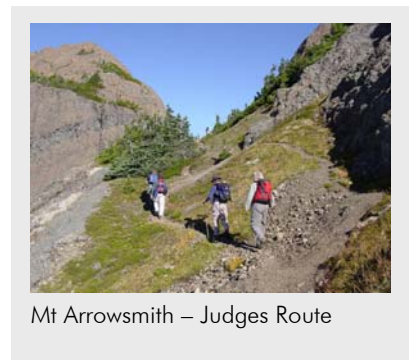
- Represents key landscapes and ecosystems of the Region;
- Encompasses unique natural, historic, cultural and archaeological features;
- Assist in protecting watersheds and important habitats as part of the RDN's broader land use planning mandate;
- Promotes the enjoyment and appreciation of regional parks and trail in a manner that assures their qualities are unimpaired for generations to come;
- Provides education and interpretation of the Region's natural features;
- Links components within the system as well as with other parks and trails in the Region and adjacent Regional Districts;
- Provides opportunities to all RDN residents to access and enjoy regional parks and trails; and
- Assists the economy of the Regional District by attracting tourists and generating revenue, as appropriate, to support the parks and trails system.

The Plan (p. 29-30) identifies several criteria to guide acquisition of lands for future regional parks:

- Priority sites from past plans;
- Regional significance;
- Level of public interest;
- Gaps in representation with respect to key landscapes, sensitive ecosystems, and distribution across all electoral areas;
- Availability for acquisition; and
- Opportunities that arise.

In addition, future trail planning and development are to be guided by the following criteria (p.36-37):

- Links to parks and open spaces;
- Links to communities;
- Gaps within and links to existing trails;
- Existing corridors;
- Availability; and
- Level of public interest and support.



Regional Context

Since adopting the Regional Parks and Trails Plan, the RDN Recreation and Parks Department has received a variety of acquisition proposals from landowners, community groups and corporate interests. The existing criteria have been useful in assessing these proposals, but have been found wanting in clarity in some cases or missing significant parameters in others.

Municipal Context

In addition, the RDN wishes to derive a clear definition of “regional significance” that could be applied to municipal parks, as well as to community parks in the electoral areas, for the potential purposes of:

- Including costs of applicable improvements in existing “regionally significant” municipal and electoral area community parks in the calculation of a future Regional Park Development Cost Charge (RP-DCC);
- Considering whether potential future sites located within municipal boundaries are “regionally significant” and could therefore be included in acquisition cost estimates in the calculation of a future RP-DCC; and/or
- Considering whether existing or future parks within municipal boundaries that meet “regionally significant” criteria could be the subject of a cost-sharing and/or co-management arrangement between the municipality and the RDN.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Review, revise and expand upon the criteria for assessing properties proposed for regional park acquisition based on the goals of the Regional Parks and Trails Plan.
2. Establish a method for applying the acquisition criteria in an objective and replicable manner when assessing sites proposed for acquisition.
3. Clarify criteria for determining parks or park sites within municipalities, or existing electoral area community parks, that are of "regional significance".

2. METHODS

1. Criteria for acquiring land for new parks or conservation areas were researched and summarized. The focus was on agencies with a regional (or greater) mandate and with goals similar to those of the RDN’s regional park system, and included:
 - other regional districts in BC.
 - BC Parks and Parks Canada.
 - county, regional and state agencies in the US and other countries.
 - land trusts and similar nongovernment agencies.

The assembly and review of acquisition criteria was not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to compare the range of characteristics that are being considered in park acquisition by other agencies to those currently used by the RDN. We also sought ideas for criteria that would be relevant to the RDN context and which RDN staff may be implicitly using already.

Methods for scoring or rating potential acquisitions against a set of criteria were also researched.

2. A list of potential acquisition criteria was compiled based on the RDN’s existing criteria and examples from elsewhere. Two possible rating schemes were also framed.
3. The draft criteria and rating schemes were ‘tested’ with Parks staff on a sample of current land acquisition proposals. This led to several revisions to the criteria and a preferred rating system based on staff’s needs.
4. A draft report that presented the criteria and rating system was prepared and circulated to municipal staff, and a meeting held with these municipal staff to discuss the proposed framework.
5. After receiving comments, this report was finalized.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Review of Acquisition Criteria from Elsewhere

Explicitly stated acquisition criteria used by local governments were rather difficult to find in a search of related documents. In some cases, acquisition criteria were inferred from goals and objectives in park master plans and other planning documents.

Explicit criteria were more commonly found in the literature published by land trusts, perhaps because this is a major focus of the mandate of land trusts.

3.2 Proposed Acquisition Criteria

Our review resulted in 20 acquisition criteria grouped under the following headings:

- Conservation values
- Recreation values
- Socio-political values
- Affordability
- Other.

The 20 proposed criteria are described in Table 1. The occurrence of equivalent criteria in use by other agencies is summarized in Table 2.

The 20 proposed criteria include all but two of the criteria currently included in the RPTP. The excluded criteria are:

- *Opportunities that arise*: "...sometimes the opportunity simply arises through development applications, donation or sale to acquire a 'prime' parcel that meets the goals of the regional parks and trails system – even when the parcel may not have been previously identified as being of interest. These opportunities should not be foregone." (RPTP 2005:30) Though this is a legitimate policy, it is not a criterion against which a proposed site can be assessed. Therefore, we recommend that this factor not be included as an assessment criterion but certainly be retained as a RPTP policy.
- *Regional significance*: "Potential sites must be of interest to the whole region; more localized sites may be considered within the community park mandate" (RPTP 2005:29). "Regional significance" is a vague characteristic to quantify on its own. In effect, most of the criteria in the following list collectively define "regional significance"; e.g., public interest, landscape representation, conservation value, recreation value, etc. Attempting to assess "regional significance" in addition to these other criteria might be considered double-counting. Our recommendation is to remove "regional significance" from the assessment criteria list but retain the term as part of the Plan's general policies.

Note, however, that this argument differs from the need to define "regional significance" with respect to municipal parks for the purpose of determining future regional park development cost charges (DCCs). This is discussed in detail in section 4.



Hamilton Marsh

Table 1: Proposed Criteria for Regional Park Acquisition

Criteria	Description (RPTP = Regional Parks & Trails Plan 2005-2015)
Conservation Values	
1. <i>Landscape representation*</i>	<p>“Key landscapes” identified in the RPTP (p.25) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Forests</u>: generally well represented in the Regional Park system, except for drier Garry oak/Arbutus woodlands. ▪ <u>Rivers/streams</u>: fairly well represented in the Regional Park system; however, their importance as wildlife and recreational corridors makes them an ongoing priority. ▪ <u>Lakes</u>: somewhat represented in the system, and in high public demand. ▪ <u>Ocean/coastline</u>: somewhat represented and in high public demand. ▪ <u>Mountain/alpine</u>: low representation, moderate to high public demand. <p>In addition, <u>unique landscapes</u> that may stand out as local or regional landmarks (e.g., knolls, waterfalls, canyons, etc.) are considered to be important landscape features to be represented in the regional park system.</p>
2. <i>Sensitive ecosystem representation*</i>	<p>Sensitive ecosystems are based on the “Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory for southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands” (SEI, 1997), and encompass: <u>Coastal bluffs</u>; <u>Terrestrial herbaceous</u> communities; <u>Older forest</u>; <u>Woodlands</u>; <u>Cliff/ dune/ spit</u> communities; <u>Wetlands</u>; <u>Riparian areas</u>; <u>Flooded fields</u>; and <u>2nd growth forest</u> (RPTP 2005:25).</p> <p>Specific sites that represent these ecosystems were identified in the SEI. Preserving and managing these identified sites within regional parks can be one of the best ways of ensuring the survival of these ecosystems and their ongoing contribution to regional biodiversity.</p> <p>However, it is well known that the SEI missed many sites that represent these ecosystems, particularly those less than 1 ha in size. Therefore, proposed sites should be assessed not only for the presence of <u>known</u> (i.e., SEI-based) Sensitive Ecosystems but also for the presence of any of these sensitive ecosystems. Assessment by a qualified environmental professional (QEP) <u>may</u> be required to determine presence of Sensitive Ecosystems.</p> <p>Note that “flooded fields” and “2nd growth forests” are considered “important ecosystems” (i.e., they provide habitat, ecological functions, etc.) but are not as sensitive, rare and/or threatened as the other six ecosystems. The rating system tries to reflect this relative significance of a “sensitive” vs. “important” ecosystem.</p>
3. <i>Endangered species</i>	<p>This criterion relates to the presence or likely presence of a “<u>red-listed</u>” (designated extirpated, endangered, or threatened in BC) or “<u>blue-listed</u>” (considered to be of special management concern in BC) species, subspecies or plant communities. Assessment by a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) <u>may</u> be required to inform this criterion, if there is insufficient baseline data to allow staff to assess.</p>
4. <i>Key habitat or wildlife corridor</i>	<p>A proposed site may be part of a significant wildlife corridor (e.g., waterway, wetland complex, ridgeline, interconnected forest habitats or meadows), or contains habitat that support species of management concern (e.g., wintering grounds, staging area, nesting habitat/bird colonies). Assessment by a QEP <u>may</u> be required.</p>
5. <i>Cultural, historic or heritage value</i>	<p>Protecting sites of historic, archaeological or cultural significance is a consideration in regional park acquisition, along with the ability to display and interpret the feature to the public. Interpretive opportunity may depend on such factors as: significance to the history of the region; accessibility to and/or viewability of the feature (e.g., the feature may be on</p>

Criteria	Description (RPTP = Regional Parks & Trails Plan 2005-2015)
	a steep slope or bluff but can be readily seen from a valley bottom or other viewpoint); and physical condition of the feature and/or the ability to restore it.
6. <i>Water source protection</i>	Protection of watersheds and aquifers that form all or part of a community water supply is an important function that a regional park can play.
Recreation Values	
7. <i>Trail or park connectivity</i>	A proposed site may connect readily to an existing park or fill in an important gap in the regional park and trail system, thereby augmenting a regional recreational corridor.
8. <i>Experiential value</i>	A proposed site may support existing recreational opportunities (e.g., hiking trails, kayaking destination, caving) and/or have the ability to support activities that are in high demand (e.g., rock climbing, bird watching, kayaking) if appropriate support facilities were put in place.
9. <i>Educational value</i>	Due to its natural features and the presence of, or ability to construct structures such as trails, boardwalks, signage, shelters or buildings, a proposed site may offer opportunities to inform the general public or support education programs about the natural or cultural history of the Region, thereby raising awareness and a sense of stewardship about these values.
10. <i>Scenic value</i>	Scenic value depends on the presence of a quality viewscape and the 'viewability' of that viewscape from places that people can access; e.g., from roads/highways, accessible viewpoints, communities, the water.
11. <i>Accessibility</i>	Consider whether the site can be accessed readily by vehicle or public transportation.
12. <i>Complements and/or is of utility to the parks and trails system</i>	<p>A proposed site may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to/enhance and/or protect (act as a buffer to) an existing park. • Provide space for services or facilities (parking, washrooms, fire protection, water security) to the park/trail system.
Socio-political Values	
13. <i>Geographical equity*</i>	The regional park and trail system should be represented across all electoral areas (RPTP 2005:29). Besides filling in gaps on an electoral area basis, it is desirable to distribute regional parks on a north-central-south sub-regional basis.
14. <i>Priority sites from past Plans*</i>	<p>"There are 10 priority sites identified in the 1998 and 2003 Acquisition Programs that have still not been secured. These sites remain primary considerations in future acquisitions. Other sites identified in the 1995 Parks System Plan but not prioritized will also be considered if other criteria apply." (RPTP 2005:29)</p> <p>While past identification and prioritization should continue to be a criterion, it is only one of many in the 2008 context. The sites identified from previous plans should be assessed against <u>all</u> of the criteria to ensure that these sites do not displace other sites of equal or greater value as regional parks.</p>
15. <i>Level of public interest*</i>	"This is an obvious criterion gauged through public input in this review process, as well as past and future interaction with the residents of the Region." (RPTP 2005:29)
16. <i>Level of Threat</i>	This is an 'urgency' criterion that tries to take into consideration whether the site may be sold for other purposes, lost to potential development activities, or subject to irreversible degradation through public or private use/misuse - and how imminent any of these threats may be.

Criteria	Description (RPTP = Regional Parks & Trails Plan 2005-2015)
Affordability	
17. Availability for acquisition	The willingness of the landholder to sell and/or donate the land can be the linchpin in a property acquisition. A “0” score here is likely cause for a significant delay if not abandonment of the proposal.
18. Acquisition Cost	<p>Cost is an obvious factor in any land acquisition. Aspects to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessed value. ▪ Asking price relative to assessed value. Some agencies have a maximum amount over assessed value that they are willing to pay from both a pragmatic as well as principled perspective (e.g., TLC – 10%?). ▪ Price negotiability. ▪ Whether other potential funding partners are interested and the capacity of those funding partners. ▪ Potential for partial or full donation, with or without tax credit. ▪ In the case of Crown land, whether the land can be acquired under a long-term lease as a “nominal rent tenure” or equivalent. ▪ In the case of more ‘expensive’ properties (e.g., waterfront), whether the property lends itself to being subdivided and a portion that does not contain appreciable conservation, recreation or socio-political values sold for sufficient funds to significantly offset the cost of the property.
19. Maintenance Cost	Parks with a lot of buildings, landscaping and other infrastructure (e.g., campsites) tend to be “high maintenance” compared to parks that can be enjoyed in a more-or-less natural or undeveloped state (trails and a few signs only are needed).
Other	
20. Size	A minimum size is desirable for consideration as a regional park in order to meet the goals of the regional park and trail system. However, the minimum desirable size may vary based on the features and land values associated with those features. A minimum size of 5 acres (2 ha) is desirable if it contains lake or coastal waterfront, and a minimum of 50 acres (20 ha) in all other cases.

* indicates a criterion currently in the RPTP.



Wallace Point



The Notch

Table 2: Park land acquisition criteria use by other agencies

	1. Landscape representation	2. Sensitive ecosystem / biodiversity	3. Species at risk	4. Key habitat/ wildlife corridor	5. Historic/ heritage/ cultural value	6. Watershed protection	7. Trail/ park connectivity	8. Experiential value	9. Educational/ research value	10. Scenic value	11. Accessibility	12. Complementarity /utility to system	13. Geographical equity	14. Priority sites from past Plans	15. Level of public interest	16. Level of Threat	17. Availability for acquisition	18. Acquisition cost or Partnership potential	19. Maintenance cost	20. Size
Governments:																				
Auckland Reg'l Council (NZ)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓					
BC Parks		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓					
Capital Regional District	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓					✓	✓		
Central Okanagan Reg District	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓
Cowichan Valley Reg District	✓	✓						✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Metro Vancouver (GVRD)		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				✓		✓			✓	✓		
Minn-STPauls Metro Council	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓				✓
Parks Canada	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓				✓	✓			
Sarasota County, Florida		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓							
SE Michigan Council of Gov'ts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	
Land Trusts/ NGOs:																				
BC Trust for Public Lands	✓	✓	✓												✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nanaimo Area Land Trust		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	
The Nature Trust of BC	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓							✓	✓		
Greenlands Challenge (Ont MNR & NCC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Lakes Region Conserv. Trust (New Hampshire)		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓		
Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy (New York)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓			✓	✓		
World Land Trust		✓	✓	✓											✓	✓	✓			

3.3 Proposed Rating System

A system for assigning a score or rating to each criterion was developed, modeled after systems used by BC Parks (“Land Evaluation and Acquisition Framework”), the BC Trust for Public Lands, and the Nanaimo and Area Land Trust. It rates a prospective site against each criterion on the basis of 1 to 10, where:

Level to which site meets criterion:									
Low	Low-Medium		Medium			Medium-High		High	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rating									

0 = no value or Acquisition Not Recommended
 ? = insufficient information to make an assessment

Table 3 demonstrates how each criterion would be scored on a scale of 1 to 10. This system allows a relatively ‘fine grain’ rating in that there is wide score range, as compared to a scale of say 1 to 3. It also treats all criteria equally - i.e., criteria are not ‘weighted’ by having different scales or maximum possible scores. The only exception is the “size” criterion, where the maximum possible score is 5 – to acknowledge but also reduce the importance of parcel size relative to other more critical values.

Table 3: Proposed Ratings for Acquisition Criteria

Criteria	Ratings
Conservation Values	
1. Landscape representation*	<p><i>Landscapes represented by the proposed site are:</i></p> <p>(1) Low = already well represented in the park system and there is not much public demand for more.</p> <p>(5) Medium = somewhat represented and there is moderate demand for more; or may have some value as a unique landscape.</p> <p>(10) High = not well represented in the park system and in high demand, or represents a strikingly unique landscape with high landmark value.</p>
2. Sensitive ecosystem representation*	<p><i>The proposed site contains:</i></p> <p>(1) Low = very small portion of an important or sensitive ecosystem (SE).</p> <p>(3) Low Medium = part of an important ecosystem or small portion or very small representative of a SE.</p> <p>(5) Medium = an important ecosystem, part of a designated SEI site or an equivalent SE that may have some disturbance.</p> <p>(10) High = a designated SEI site or equivalent SE of significant size and in pristine condition, more than one SE, or at least one significantly-sized SE + important ecosystem.</p>
3. Endangered species	<p><i>In the proposed site:</i></p> <p>(1) Low – a blue-listed species is <u>suspected</u> to occur based on specific habitat characteristics occurring on the site.</p>

Criteria	Ratings
	<p>(5) Medium – 1-3 blue-listed species are <u>known</u> to occur.</p> <p>(10) High – at least one red-listed is known or suspected or 3 or more blue listed species are known to occur.</p>
4. <i>Key habitat or wildlife corridor</i>	<p>The proposed site has:</p> <p>(1) Low – limited wildlife habitat/corridor significance (e.g., peripheral to known habitats).</p> <p>(5) Medium – moderate wildlife corridor or habitat significance.</p> <p>(10) High – known wildlife corridor or critical habitat.</p>
5. <i>Cultural, historic or heritage value</i>	<p>The proposed site contains:</p> <p>(1) Low – a minor heritage feature and provides limited opportunity for historical/cultural interpretation.</p> <p>(3) Low Moderate – contains a heritage feature that requires significant restoration but which would once restored, provide some opportunity for interpretation and appreciation.</p> <p>(5) Moderate- contains a heritage or cultural feature that requires some restoration but that once restored, would provide considerable opportunity for interpretation and appreciation.</p> <p>(7) Moderate High – contains a heritage feature of considerable interest from the surrounding community or regional population.</p> <p>(10) High – a heritage feature of considerable interest from the surrounding region and has some provincial or even national heritage value.</p>
6. <i>Water source protection</i>	<p>The proposed site encompasses or overlays, and would thereby protect:</p> <p>(1) Low – a minimal amount of a community watershed or aquifer.</p> <p>(5) Medium – a considerable area of a community watershed or aquifer.</p> <p>(10) High – almost all of a watershed or aquifer serving a community.</p>
Recreation Values	
7. <i>Trail or park connectivity</i>	<p>The proposed site:</p> <p>(1) Low – is isolated but might be connectable to the regional park/trail system within 10-20 years.</p> <p>(5) Moderate – is connectable to park/trail system within 5 years.</p> <p>(10) High – enhances existing park and/or connects directly to the trail system.</p>
8. <i>Experiential value</i>	<p>The proposed site:</p> <p>(1) Low – contains one or two features with limited experiential value or would require considerable investment to provide an experience</p> <p>(3) Low Mod – could support some high demand experiences with some investment</p> <p>(5) Moderate – supports existing high demand experiences to moderate extent or moderate potential to do so with some investment</p> <p>(7) Mod High – supports existing high demand experiences already</p> <p>(10) High - supports existing high demand experiences already and has potential to support more</p>

Criteria	Ratings
9. <i>Educational value</i>	The proposed site: (1) Low – contains few features that offer opportunities for educational interpretation. (5) Moderate – has some features of educational and interpretive value and can support a moderate amount of infrastructure and use for this purpose. (10) High – contains significant features of interpretive value, and has facilities or can support facilities for intensive public interpretation and education.
10. <i>Scenic value</i>	The scenic value of the proposed site is: (1) Low –seen from limited viewpoint(s), pleasant but not spectacular panorama. (5) Moderate –viewable from a limited no. of viewpoints, rewarding view. (10) High – breath-taking and seen from many places and/or by many people.
11. <i>Accessibility</i>	The proposed site is: (1) Low – difficult to access by vehicle (e.g., long rough logging road), or greater than 10 minute walk to enter park. (5) Moderate – within a 5-10 minute walk of an accessible parking area over a public trail system. (10) High – readily accessible by car.
12. <i>Complementarity and/or utility to the parks and trails system</i>	The proposed site provides: (1) Low – limited enhancement or utility purpose (5) Moderate – moderate enhancement or utility purpose (10) High – significant enhancement and/or utility purpose in providing service space for an existing park or as a hub on the trail system.
Socio-political Values	
13. <i>Geographical equity*</i>	The proposed site: 0 – does not fill a geographical gap, and indeed may increase the imbalance among electoral areas or sub-regions. (1) Low – addresses disparity to a very limited extent. (5) Moderate – provides some balancing of geographical representation. (10) High – contributes significantly to balancing geographical representation.
14. <i>Priority sites from past Plans*</i>	The proposed site: (1) Low – contains part of an unprioritized sites identified in the 1995 Parks System Plan (3) Low-Mod - partially includes a priority site OR one of the other sites identified in the 1995 Parks System Plan (5) Moderate – Contains part of a priority site. (8) Mod High - satisfactorily encompasses a priority site (10) High - satisfactorily encompasses a priority site + complementary high value land.
15. <i>Level of public interest*</i>	The proposed site is subject to: (1) Low - minor localized public interest (5) Moderate - measurable public interest from more than local area (10) High - Significant public interest from a wide area in the Region.

Criteria	Ratings
16. Level of Threat	The proposed site is under: (1) Low – low threat from pending development or degradation (>10 years). (5) Moderate – threat of development or severe damage within 5-10 years. (10) High – development or irreversible damage is imminent; “protect now or never”.
Affordability	
17. Availability for acquisition	(1) Low – landholder is mildly interested under the right conditions and/or price and/or there are encumbrances on the land that limit its availability or usability as a future park. (5) Moderate – landholder is moderately motivated to sell the land for park purposes; may be a few encumbrances of minor importance. (10) – landholder is highly motivated to sell with partial donation, no encumbrances.
18. Acquisition Cost	The cost of the proposed site is: 0 – astronomical, clearly over-priced and non-negotiable. (1) Low – Negotiable and within maximum limit, little or no potential for cost sharing with funding partners. (5) Moderate – Negotiable to a moderate price with good potential for some cost-sharing or partial donation by owner. (7) Mod High – Negotiable and very fair, high potential for cost-sharing with funding partners and/or partial donation by owner. (8-9) High – is Crown land and the Provincial or Federal government is willing to provide long-term tenure at a relatively nominal fee. (10) Very High – Owner (private or Crown) is willing to donate the entire site.
19. Maintenance Cost	The proposed site would require: (1) – a significant amount of staff time and financial resources to maintain the on-site structures (5) – a moderate amount of staff time and financial resources to maintain the on-site facilities and structures (10) – very little staff time and financial resources to maintain.
Other	
20. Size	(5) The proposed site is: - a minimum of 5 acres if it contains lake or coastal waterfront, or - a minimum of 50 acres in all other cases. (0) The proposed site does not meet the above minimum desirable size.
	MAXIMUM POSSIBLE SCORE: 195

3.4 Test Case

Appendix 1 contains a sample checklist based on the proposed criteria and rating system. An example application is shown using one of the sites currently in the RPTP priority list – Gainsburg Swamp; the scores reflect a preliminary ‘test run’ conducted by the author with RDN parks staff, and are intended only to illustrate the potential use of the criteria and rating framework.

4. ASSESSING “REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE”

“Regional significance” becomes an independent assessment factor when considering parks and potential park sites within municipalities for the purposes of including them in Regional Park DCC calculations and/or considering joint RDN-municipality administration.



Harewood Plains

4.1 Existing Municipal and EA Community Parks

When the RDN initially proposed establishing a RP-DCC, municipal staff noted that some of the existing municipal parks could be considered “regionally significant” in that they draw a high proportion of users from outside the municipal boundaries. The same can be said for some community parks in the electoral areas. Municipal and RDN staff suggested that the costs for major improvements to these municipal and community parks should be included in the calculation of a RP-DCC.¹

For this purpose, regional significance would be defined by the following:

- the municipal or community park reflects the goals of the RPTP, and scores highly in the acquisition criteria relating to Conservation Values, Recreation Values and Size; and
- the municipal or community park attracts a high level of interest and use from outside the municipality or immediate community.

In other words, for the purposes of a future Regional Park DCC, a “regionally significant” municipal or community park is a ‘natural’ park that has proven to be a significant attraction or destination for users from outside the municipality’s boundaries or beyond the immediate community. Playing fields or other ‘active’ recreational facilities that may attract users from the region do not fit the “Regional Park” mandate. Examples might include Linley Valley and Westwood Lake Parks in Nanaimo, the Brown Property in Qualicum Beach, Top Bridge Municipal Park in Parksville, Top Bridge Community Park in Area G, and the future Foothills property in Lantzville.

It is not the intent to “take over” these parks as regional parks; the RDN has neither the capacity nor desire to do so. Identifying their regional significance would be solely for the capacity to include costs of planned major improvements in calculating a future RP-DCC calculation.

4.2 Potential Park Sites within Municipalities

In theory, a regional park and trail system should “know no municipal boundaries”. To date, potential sites for future regional parks have been identified only in the electoral areas. However, there is no reason why proposed sites within municipal boundaries could not be considered “regionally significant” for the purposes of:

- a) including the cost of acquisition in calculating a RP-DCC; and/or
- b) at the municipality’s request, considering a cost-sharing and/or co-management arrangement between the municipality and the RDN.

Given its current commitments to existing regional parks and the backlog of potential sites in electoral areas, it is highly unlikely that the RDN would seek to acquire a site within a municipality

¹ See “Development Cost Charges for Regional Park Acquisition and Improvement : a study for the RDN” (Lanarc Consultants Ltd., 2007), page 11.

independently – i.e., without at least the involvement if not the leadership of the municipal government.

However, for the purposes of either (a) or (b), regional significance would be defined, and the RDN could become involved, if the site reflects the goals of the RPTP and scores highly in all of the regional park acquisition criteria.

4.3 Summary – Using the Criteria and Rating Framework

For the purpose of applying the Regional Park acquisition criteria and rating framework, the criteria can be divided into 3 groups -

Group A	Group B	Group C
Conservation	Socio-political	Affordability
1. Landscape representation 2. Sensitive ecosystem rep'n 3. Endangered species 4. Key habitat/wildlife corridor 5. Cultural, historic, heritage value 6. Water source protection	13. Geographical equity 14. Priority sites from past Plans 15. Level of public interest 16. Level of threat	17. Availability for acquisition 18. Acquisition Cost 19. Maintenance Cost
Recreation		
7. Trail or park connectivity 8. Experiential value 9. Educational value 10. Scenic value 11. Accessibility 12. Complements or of utility to parks & trails system		
Other		
20. Size		

- and then applied in the following contexts:

CONTEXT	CRITERIA		
	Group A	Group B	Group C
1. Assess and prioritize <u>current</u> proposed sites in electoral areas being considered for regional parks.	✓	✓	✓
2. Assess <u>new</u> sites in electoral areas as they are proposed – evaluate/prioritize against current proposed sites.	✓	✓	✓
3. Assess <u>existing municipal and community</u> parks for their “regional significance” – to include costs of applicable improvements in RP-DCC calculations.	✓ + *		
4. Assess <u>potential</u> park sites <u>in municipalities</u> for “regional significance” for purpose of: a. including acquisition cost in RP-DCC calculation; or b. considering cost-sharing and/or co-management between municipality and RDN	✓	✓	✓

* + level of use by people from outside municipality.

5. STUDY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has drawn upon a review of park planning and management literature to derive a more comprehensive list of criteria for assessing proposals for park land acquisition than currently exists in the Regional Parks and Trails Plan 2005-2015. It also has developed a preliminary system for rating site proposals against these criteria.

The proposed system is intended as an initial step in creating an acquisition assessment framework that the RDN can use with confidence. It is also intended as a tool to assist the RDN and member municipalities in building a park and trail system that is truly “regionally significant”.

It is recommended that this proposed system be:

- Continue to be reviewed by RDN staff, municipal representatives and the RPTAC.
- Applied on a preliminary basis to all the current acquisition proposals to confirm that the system makes sense intuitively as well as to identify further refinements.
- Continue to evolve over time to increase its functionality as a tool for assessing park acquisition proposals.

6. REFERENCES

- Auckland (New Zealand) Regional Council. 1999. Regional Parkland Acquisition Plan. From www.arc.govt.nz.
- B.C. Parks and EcoPlan International Inc. 2001. LEAF for Private Lands: How to Evaluate and Score Properties. BC Parks Land Evaluation and Acquisition Framework, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.
- BC Trust for Public Lands. Land Securement Project Funding Application, December 15, 2006 template.
- Capital Regional District. 2000. Parks Master Plan.
- Central Okanagan Regional District. 2000. Our Regional Parks: The Official Regional Parks Plan for the Central Okanagan.
- Cowichan Valley Regional District. 2007. Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.
- Greater Vancouver Regional District. 2005. Green spaces - natural places. Regional Parks and Greenways Plan.
- GVRD: E. Andrusiak, Parks Manager report to GVRD Parks Committee, 17 March 2006: Update on the Heritage Parkland Acquisition Fund.
http://www.metrovancouver.org/boards/Parks%20Committee/Parks_Committee-April_5_2006-Agenda.pdf
- Lakes Region Conservation Trust (New Hampshire). Land Protection Policies and Acquisition Criteria. From http://www.conservationguide.com/CLARK_ATTACHMENTS/3.LandProtectionPoliciesLakesRegionCT.pdf
- Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Council (Minnesota). The making of a regional park: Big Marine Park Reserve in Washington County. From <http://www.metrocouncil.org/directions/parks/parks2007/BigMarinePark07.htm>
- Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy – Land Acquisition Criteria (revised 2007). From <http://www.mohawkhudson.org/Library/LandCrit.htm>
- Nanaimo Area Land Trust. Criteria Checklist for Prospective Covenant Properties and Land Acquisitions. Draft May 2001 (unpublished).
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Nature Conservancy of Canada. The Greenlands Challenge: a component of the Ontario Greenlands Program. Guidelines for Applicants September 2008. From http://www.natureconservancy.ca/site/DocServer/Guidelines_for_Applicants_08_09.pdf?docID=2642.
- Parks Canada. 1999. Parks Canada System Plan.
- Sarasota County, Florida. Land Acquisition Program Nomination Form. From <http://www.co.sarasota.fl.us/EnvironmentalServices/NaturalResources/ResourceManagement/LandAcquisitions.asp>.
- Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. Criteria for Acquiring Parkland. From <http://www.semco.org>.
- The Nature Trust of British Columbia. Criteria for Selecting Acquisitions. From http://www.naturetrust.bc.ca/key_land_accq.php.
- Washington County Parks, Minnesota. St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park Master Plan. From http://www.co.washington.mn.us/info_for_residents/parks_division/park_and_trail_planning/st_croix_bluffs_regional_park/
- World Land Trust. Project Selection Criteria. From <http://www.worldlandtrust.org/projects/criteria.htm>

APPENDIX A

RDN Regional Parks Acquisition Criteria and Rating System – SCORE SHEET
 DRAFT 28-Oct-08

Proposed Site:	Gainsburg Swamp (trial run)
Assessed by:	
Date of assessment:	27 Oct 2008

Low	Low-Med	Medium	Med-High	High
1	2 3 4	5 6	7 8 9	10

0 = No value or acquisition not recommended

? = insufficient information to assess

Criteria	Rating Scheme	Points	Comments to support assigned points
Conservation Values			
1. Landscape representation*	Landscapes represented by the proposed site are: (1) Low = already well represented in the park system and there is not much public demand for more. (5) Medium = somewhat represented and there is moderate demand for more; or may have some value as a unique landscape. (10) High = not well represented in the park system and in high demand, or represents a strikingly unique landscape with high landmark value.	9	
2. Sensitive ecosystem representation*	The proposed site contains: (1) Low = very small portion of an important or sensitive ecosystem. (3) Low Medium = part of an important ecosystem or small portion or very small representative of a SE. (5) Medium = an important ecosystem, part of a designated SEI site or an equivalent SE that may have some disturbance. (10) High = a designated SEI site or equivalent SE of significant size and in pristine condition, more than one SEs, or at least one significantly-sized SE + important ecosystem.	9	
3. Endangered species	In the proposed site: (1) Low – a blue-listed species is <u>suspected</u> based on specific habitat characteristics occurring on the site. (5) Medium – 1-3 blue-listed species are <u>known</u> to occur. (10) High – at least one red-listed is known or suspected or >3 blue listed species are known to occur.	8	
4. Key habitat or wildlife corridor	The proposed site has: (1) Low – limited wildlife habitat/corridor significance (e.g., peripheral to known habitats). (5) Medium – moderate wildlife corridor or habitat significance. (10) High – known wildlife corridor or critical habitat.	9	
5. Cultural, historic or heritage value	The proposed site contains: (1) Low – a minor heritage feature and provides limited opportunity for historical/cultural interpretation. (3) Low Moderate – contains a heritage feature that requires significant restoration but which would once restored, provide some opportunity for interpretation and appreciation. (5) Moderate- contains a heritage or cultural feature that requires some restoration but that once restored, would provide considerable opportunity for interpretation and appreciation. (7) Moderate High – contains a heritage feature of considerable interest from the surrounding community or regional population. (10) High – a heritage feature of considerable interest from the surrounding region and has some provincial or even national heritage value.	3	? Needs research
6. Water source protection	The proposed site encompasses or overlays, and would thereby protect: (1) Low – a minimal amount of a community watershed or aquifer. (5) Medium – a considerable area of a community watershed or aquifer. (10) High – almost all of a watershed or aquifer serving a community.	9	
Recreation Values			
7. Trail or park connectivity	The proposed site: (1) Low – is isolated but might be connectable to the regional park/trail system within 10-20 years. (5) Moderate – is connectable to park/trail system within 5 years. (10) High – enhances existing park and/or connects directly to the trail system.	9	

Criteria	Rating Scheme	Points	Comments to support assigned points
8. <i>Experiential value</i>	The proposed site: (1) Low – contains one or two features with limited experiential value or would require considerable investment to provide an experience (3) Low Mod – could support some high demand experiences with some investment (5) Moderate – supports existing high demand experiences to moderate extent or moderate potential to do so with some investment (7) Mod High – supports existing high demand experiences already (10) High - supports existing high demand experiences already and has potential to support more	6	Limited capacity to support people use
9. <i>Educational value</i>	The proposed site: (1) Low – contains few features that offer opportunities for educational interpretation. (5) Moderate – has some features of educational and interpretive value and can support a moderate amount of infrastructure and use for this purpose. (10) High – contains significant features of interpretive value, and has facilities or can support facilities for intensive public interpretation and education.	9	
10. <i>Scenic value</i>	The scenic value of the proposed site is: (1) Low –seen from limited viewpoint(s), pleasant but not spectacular panorama. (5) Moderate –viewable from a limited no. of viewpoints, rewarding view. (10) High – breath-taking and seen from many places and/or by many people.	5	
11. <i>Accessibility</i>	The proposed site is: (1) Low – difficult to access by vehicle (e.g., long rough logging road), or greater than 10 minute walk to enter park. (5) Moderate – within a 5-10 minute walk of an accessible parking area over a public trail system. (10) High – readily accessible by car.	9	
12. <i>Complementarity and/or utility to the parks and trails system</i>	The proposed site provides: (1) Low – limited enhancement or utility purpose (5) Moderate – moderate enhancement or utility purpose (10) High – significant enhancement and/or utility purpose in providing service space for an existing park or as a hub on the trail system.	7	
Socio-political Values			
13. <i>Geographical equity*</i>	The proposed site: 0 – does not fill a geographical gap, and indeed may increase the imbalance among EAs or sub-regions. (1) Low – addresses disparity in geographical representation to a very limited extent. (5) Moderate – provides some balancing of geographical representation. (10) High – contributes significantly to balancing geographical representation.	8	
14. <i>Priority sites from past Plans*</i>	The proposed site: (1) Low – contains part of an unprioritized sites identified in the 1995 Parks System Plan (3) Low-Mod - partially includes a priority site OR one of the other sites identified in the 1995 Parks System Plan (5) Moderate – Contains part of a priority site. (8) Mod High - satisfactorily encompasses a priority site (10) High - satisfactorily encompasses a priority site + complementary high value land.	10	
15. <i>Level of public interest*</i>	The proposed site is subject to: (1) Low - minor localized public interest (5) Moderate - measurable public interest from more than local area (10) High - Significant public interest from a wide area in the Region.	2	Could change if Province comes back with another development proposal
16. <i>Level of Threat</i>	The proposed site is under: (1) Low – low threat from pending development or degradation (>10 years). (5) Moderate – threat of development or severe damage within 5-10 years. (10) High – development or irreversible damage is imminent; “protect now or never”.	4	Could change if Province comes back with another development proposal

Criteria	Rating Scheme	Points	Comments to support assigned points
Affordability			
17. Availability for acquisition	(1) Low – landholder is mildly interested under the right conditions and/or price and/or there are encumbrances on the land that limit its availability or usability as a future park. (5) Moderate – landholder is moderately motivated to sell the land for park purposes; may be a few encumbrances of minor importance. (10) – landholder is highly motivated to sell with partial donation, no encumbrances.	5	Majority of land is Crown; Province needs to be asked if willing to provide long term lease at nominal rate.
18. Acquisition cost	The cost of the proposed site is: 0 – astronomical, clearly over-priced and non-negotiable. (1) Low – Negotiable and within maximum limit, little or no potential for cost sharing with funding partners. (5) Moderate – Negotiable to a moderate price with good potential for some cost-sharing or partial donation by owner. (7) Mod High – Negotiable and very fair, high potential for cost-sharing with funding partners and/or partial donation by owner. (8-9) Very High – is Crown land and the Provincial or Federal government is willing to provide long-term tenure at a relatively nominal fee “in the public interest”. (10) High – Owner (private or Crown) is willing to donate the entire site.	9	See note about approaching Province; this score assumes best case scenario.
19. Maintenance cost	The proposed site would require: (1) – a significant amount of staff time and financial resources to maintain the on-site structures (5) – a moderate amount of staff time and financial resources to maintain the on-site facilities and structures (10) – very little staff time and financial resources to maintain.	8	Assumes fairly extensive boardwalking will be needed and require maintenance.
Other			
20. Size	(5) The proposed site is: - a minimum of 5 acres if it contains lake or coastal waterfront, or - a minimum of 50 acres in all other cases. (0) If the proposed site does not meet the above minimum desirable size.	5	
	TOTAL POINTS:	143	
	<i>Out of Total Possible Points of:</i>	195	