

Info Package Date: Nov 18/20

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The District of North Vancouver INFORMATION REPORT TO COUNCIL

October 14, 2020
File: 12.6285.01/000.000

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SUBJECT: Seymour Trails Strategic Planning

REASON FOR REPORT:

The purpose of this report is to provide Mayor and Council with an update on steps taken, and further planning initiatives towards a comprehensive Seymour Trails Strategic Plan.

SUMMARY:

Parks has begun work on developing a Seymour Trails Strategic Plan. While other land managers on Mount Seymour (BC Parks and CMHC) have also begun preliminary trail planning work, MetroVan is the only land manager who has developed a more complete trails guideline plan for the LSCR region, at this point in time. Over the next year, the Parks department will continue to work towards a comprehensive plan for trail management that incorporates the key trail use values – **environmental protection, ecological sustainability, sustainable trail infrastructure and use, and multi-use access.**

In anticipation of the continued increase in recreational use, it is recommended that special care be taken to protect and preserve wetlands, streams, and streambanks, as emphasized in the Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan.

Public consultation, stakeholder engagement, agreements with adjacent land managers, and master planning will be key roles of a dedicated trail planning consultant. Parks will work closely with the consultant to ensure that a high quality trail network is developed, that respects the environment, provides access to a wide variety of users, without compromising trail user excitement or enjoyment.

BACKGROUND:

Mount Seymour contains an extensive network of trails, and recreational use has been increasing steadily over the past decade. A similar pattern was seen on Fromme back in 2008 when the District developed a trail management plan for Fromme. While the trails on Fromme are largely maintained by the North Shore Mountain Biking Association (NSMBA), under the Fromme Mountain Trail Maintenance Agreement (Agreement), no such agreement exists on Seymour - largely due to the fact that a formal strategic plan has not yet been developed for Seymour, and the vast majority of the trails on Seymour are currently classified as unauthorized.

There are myriad of challenges that complicate a seamless strategic plan on Seymour, such as; land ownership, land claims, private property issues, competing recreational uses, environmentally

sensitive areas, and access to some locations within the study area. Parks has been working towards a management plan framework, while trying to navigate these challenges.

The Fromme Mountain Sustainable Trail Use and Classification Plan (the Plan), approved by the Council in 2008, provides guidelines and best management practices (BMPs) to help minimize the environmental impacts of recreational trails and use. The subsequent Fromme Mountain Trails Environmental Assessment (Fromme Assessment), finalized in 2015, was undertaken by the District to determine the environmental condition of a representative sample of Fromme Mountain trails, and provides recommendations for sustainable trail management. Since the Plan and Fromme Assessment were completed, the DNV has applied its BMPs for trail construction and maintenance to the few authorized trails on Mount Seymour, as resources have permitted.

Mount Seymour is a complicated patchwork of land ownership that includes regional, provincial, federal land (CMHC), private property, and DNV lease land that will require inter-jurisdictional agreements for the management of any shared trails. DNV Parks staff have begun discussions with CMHC, MetroVan, and BC Parks (BCP) with respect to shared ownership and management of trails, and have worked collaboratively on a few trail construction and decommissioning projects. Both CMHC and BCP are also currently working on preliminary plans towards a trails management strategy. MetroVan has developed a plan specific to the LSCR region.

DNV Actions:

In line with Council's commitment to support sustainable trail use, the DNV initiated baseline environmental assessments of trails in the Cove Forest area of Deep Cove on Mount Seymour in 2017, and then in the Berkley Hyannis, Central Seymour and Darkside areas in 2018. Over 60 kilometers of both authorized and unauthorized hiking and biking trails were captured within these reports, and assessed in the context of environmental sustainability.

The purpose of the assessments was to establish a baseline dataset of trail conditions and environmental impacts, as prior to this, no formal inventory or assessment of trails on Mount Seymour had been conducted. In 2019 a complete assessment of all technical trail features (TTF's) was completed for all trails, to capture a baseline inventory of all built structures (jumps, ramps, bridges, boardwalks, etc.) on District trails, including those on Seymour.

In 2019, Parks, BCP and the NSMBA worked collaboratively on developing and constructing the first all access / adaptive mountain bike trail in the Central Seymour area, which has been a tremendous success. Riders of all levels and capabilities have enjoyed this trail.

In 2020, as a result of the Seymour trail assessments, four distinct management zones were identified for trails on District lands. These management zones were prioritized based on volume of use and impact ratings, and not surprisingly, in order of priority the four management zones are; Berkley Hyannis, Central Seymour, Cove Forest, and the Darkside - those zones adjacent the highest density residential areas were rated as the highest priority, due to ecological impact and volume of use.

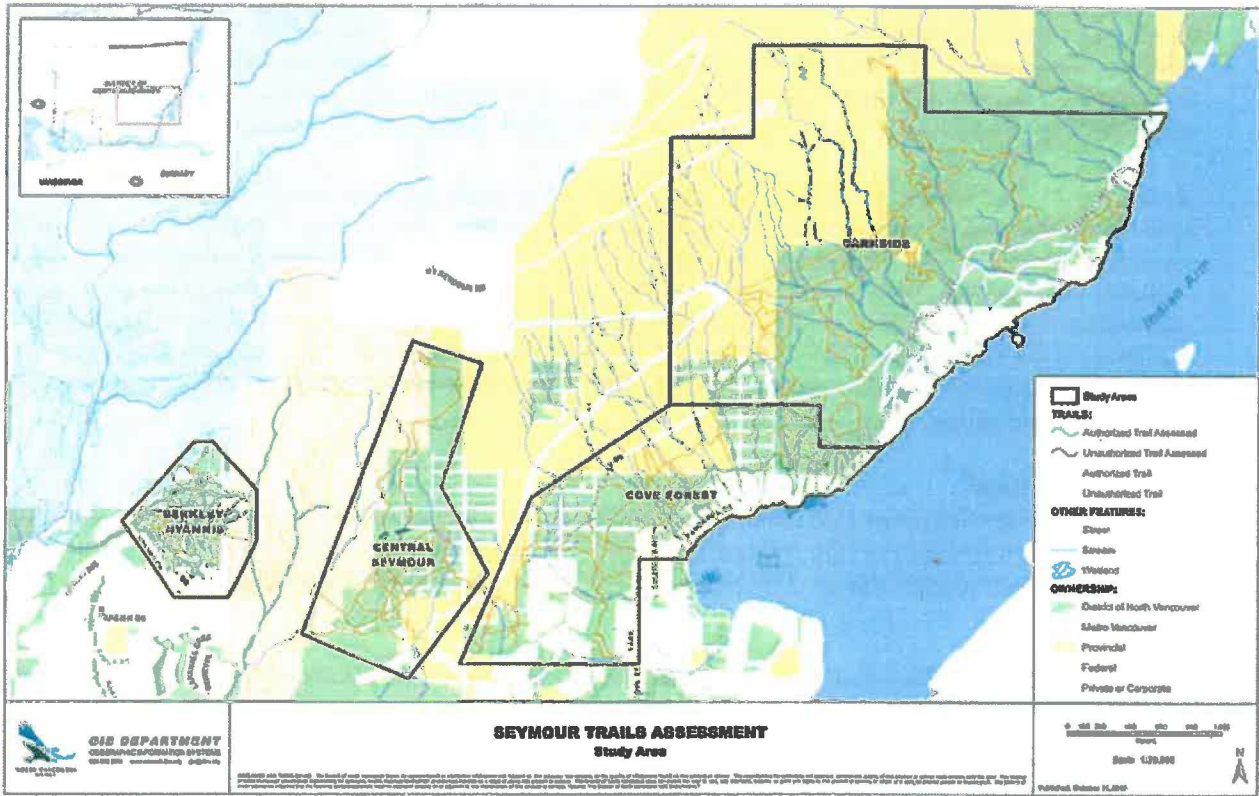


Fig. 1 – Seymour Trails, study areas, and land ownership.

Staff have begun to focus their efforts on the Berkley Hyannis area, and are currently developing a framework for trail decommissioning, consolidation, and select closures as a means to reduce the environmental impact from a heavily braided and often redundant trail network. However, in the absence of an agreement such as the one with the NSMBA on Fromme, and the deferral of the seasonal trail crew due to COVID-19 financial cut-backs this year, it has been challenging for staff to make significant progress in this area, and are focussing on relatively minor “quick wins” as a stop-gap measure until resources are again made available.

For 2021/22, Parks will continue to rely upon a seasonal trail crew responsible for trail maintenance, minor infrastructure repairs, decommissioning of unsustainable trails, and restoration of heavily impacted areas. Berkley Hyannis, and Central Seymour will be priority areas during this time.

Staff have also begun to collect trail usage data in the Central Seymour study area, through the installation of strategically located trail counters. As trail use fluctuates by season, trail counters will remain in place for several months in each location. Once data is collected in one area, counters will be relocated into the other study areas over the next 9-12 months.

Currently only six authorized trails with the DNV owned Seymour trails network have permits assigned to independent trail builders to undertake necessary maintenance and repairs on an as-needed basis. This work is purely on a volunteer basis, as no additional budget has been assigned to trails on Seymour. These six trails are classified as mountain bike primary. To date, no hiking trails have authorized trail permit holders.

Under the current system, Seymour trails are overseen by a single Trail and Habitat Coordinator within the Parks Department. Trail permits, requests for repairs and maintenance, trail improvements and the coordination of decommissioning of unauthorized trails are the responsibility of this single staff person. Bylaw and environmental protection enforcement falls upon the Park Rangers, who also assist in coordinating and participating in unsustainable trail decommissioning.

Recently, a very large fully developed and illegally built trail was located on Seymour. The environmental impact of this trail was significant with many mature trees illegally removed, and vast amounts of native soil moved to construct the trail. As the trail initiated on BC Parks lands before entering DNV lands, Rangers and Parks staff worked in collaboration with BCP Rangers to swiftly dismantle high risk structures and decommissioned the trail, which exited onto a private road in the Sunshine Falls neighbourhood. Through the North Shore Restorative Justice Program, the District worked with the trail builder, who was fined and assigned 50 hours of community service to support trail restoration areas.

Future Planning:

The DNV owned Seymour trail network is comprised of approximately the same linear quantity of trails as Fromme, however it is spread out over a much larger geographical area, with many trails crossing multiple jurisdictions. The total length of trails across all jurisdictions far surpasses that of Fromme.

As a considerable amount of trail assessment and data gathering on Seymour has already been completed by staff, next steps would include retention of a dedicated Park Planning position (under contract) to oversee the study, and the engagement of a trail planning consultant to; collate and analyse data, develop priorities and prepare initial recommendations, consult with adjacent land managers, conduct public open houses and stakeholder engagement sessions, in-field intercept surveys, on-line surveys, and begin to prepare a plan for trail management. If endorsed by Council and budgetary resources were made available, this process would start in early 2021.

During the consultation phase, District staff will be requesting that the consultant closely consider and make recommendations for specific hiking only trails and loops, as the demand for this type of single use trail is on the rise.

Refer to "Attachment 1" for details on scope of trail study.

Future Trail Management:

Once a strategic plan has been developed and endorsed by Council, operational budgets and staff resources would need to be allocated on an annual basis to manage the trail system. Currently on Fromme, the NSMBA receives an annual budget of \$100,000 for trail maintenance work performed on behalf of the District. As part of the study different maintenance models will be explored and evaluated.

As the NSMBA only maintains authorized mountain biking trails on Fromme, hiking trails receive minor maintenance, unless performed by volunteers or the District Trail and Habitat Coordinator as resources allow. Ideally, a year-round full time alpine trail crew would be approved within Parks to inspect and maintain trails, to decommission unsustainable trails, and / or those trails that may be recommended for closure through the study.

While many trails cross multi-jurisdictional boundaries on Seymour, trail maintenance agreements would need to be developed with adjacent land managers, to ensure seamless transitions for trail users, as well as a consistent level of maintenance and repair.

ANALYSIS:

Timing/Approval Process:

The Seymour Trails Strategic Plan will be given a priority in 2021, with initial planning steps, formalization of a project team to begin the project, and a public consultation framework being developed in Q1. The study project would then proceed through the remainder of the year, with preliminary recommendations being presented in early 2022.

Financial Impacts:

Parks estimates the project team would require a one time budgetary allocation of \$100,000 in 2021 to support completion of the study.

Future staff resourcing, operational budget, and contract for service budgets will be determined at a later date, in response to recommendations following the completion of the study.

Liability/Risk:

With the authorization of formal trails on Mount Seymour will come a higher duty of care for the District, as there will be an expectation for trail inspection and routine maintenance. Joint management agreements will need to be sought with adjacent land owners.

Social Policy Implications:

As previously stated, there are significant land ownerships, First Nations land claims on adjacent federal lands, private property, and lease land considerations which will need to be taken into consideration during the consultation phase.

Environmental Impact:

The Parks Department's key trail use values are; environmental protection, ecological sustainability, sustainable trail infrastructure and use, and multi-use access. While Parks will endeavour to create a trail network that meets these values, there is the real possibility that a formalized and authorized plan may also draw more regional users as area becomes more popular.

Public Input:

Public input will be critical in informing any future management decisions guiding the strategic plan, and will be undertaken in collaboration with the Corporate Communications Department.

The Parks and Natural Environment Advisory Committee (PNEAC) will be consulted and will provide study oversight.

Conclusion:

With no formal trail management plan in place for the Mount Seymour trail network, and trail use rising in popularity over the past decade, Parks is recommending that Council endorse a framework to continue the planning of a comprehensive Seymour Trails Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted,



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REVIEWED WITH:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Clerk's Office _____	External Agencies:
<input type="checkbox"/> Development Planning _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Library Board _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Development Engineering _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance _____	<input type="checkbox"/> NS Health _____
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<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Bylaw Services _____	

Appendix 1.

Scope of Seymour Trails Strategic Plan would include the following key elements, some of which are currently underway, or complete:

- Inventory and review of existing trails within an environmental sustainability and condition assessment context
- Identify sensitive ecological areas that require protection strategies to support a balance of recreational access and environmental protection
- Review existing trails within the context of existing trail, environmental, park and climate change policies, bylaws, best management practices, construction standards and risk management
- Develop a recommended trail classification system that identifies different trail uses (single use hiking, mountain biking, and multi-use trails etc.), highlights trails to formalize and upgrade, identifies unsustainable trails from an environmental, risk management, or trail construction framework,
- Develop a public consultation process to engage the variety of stakeholders and trail users for feedback
- Recommend a signage package that identifies trail heads, trail maps, trail type and ratings, directional information, trail user information and regulations.
- Identify key staging and parking areas to access trails, and review potential barrier free access trails, where feasible
- Review sustainable trail design standards and best management practices, that include vegetation restoration and forest management, as applicable
- Develop a planning and budgeting framework for capital and trail maintenance programs to implement the final approved trail plan
- Develop an implementation plan for final approved recommendations that identifies annual work priorities with annual funding
- Explore models and different frameworks for trail maintenance, enforcement, and risk management to effectively manage the final approved trail classification system
- Apply an adaptive management approach which permits on-going monitoring and modifications, as required, to ensure the vision and intent of trail plan is achieved
- Work collaboratively with adjacent land managers (Metro Vancouver, CMHC, & BC Parks) where trails cross into other jurisdictions to ensure continuity in trail management and priorities.

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