



Connecting People and Nature

IN CENTRAL OKANAGAN PARKS



THE FRAMEWORK FOR RECREATION IN CANADA GOALS AND PRIORITIES:



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE



ACTIVE LIVING



INCLUSION AND ACCESS

CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

Wayne Darlington, Manager of Park Planning & Capital Projects in the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) says: “Many people don’t use park trails because they are worried about getting lost, encountering wildlife, and a lack of fitness to negotiate the path. Others do not visit parks because of accessibility barriers.” The RDCO wanted to address these challenges and the goals in the Recreation Framework. “We wanted the public to become more engaged with their parks, connect with nature and become more active,” says Darlington.



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IMPLEMENTATION

The RDCO applied for and received a grant to address the challenges described above and several of the Framework goals.

“Trails to Health” focused on getting the least active people to swap time on their couches for walking in nature (Goals 1 and 3), and to get “back to being Canadian”. The RDCO identified one trail per regional park that was considered “easy” or “super easy”. The chosen trails were a short distance, (200 to 500 metres long), with smooth surfaces on which to walk or wheel. These trails are highlighted and described on their website, in a booklet and on the park wayfinding information. The RDCO is also looking at resurfacing the more difficult “blue trails” and adding wayfinding and interpretation so that after people have conquered the shorter trails, they can move on to more difficult ones. In addition, they are re-designing the front of each of the parks to be more attractive and welcoming, including information about the park, improved signage and trail names, and wayfinding information. This is a work in progress, but the hope is that in the next five years, more trails will be identified, named and made more inclusive and accessible.

As a spin off, RDCO established the “Tracks Program” for those recovering from a health-related issue (e.g. heart attack, injury) where organized groups can come together to walk in a park. They are encouraged to start with small walks and increase the distance and difficulty over time.

OUTCOMES

The improvements to the park, the Trails to Health program and the Tracks Program have encouraged and enabled people who were not previously doing so to come and walk in the parks, to connect with nature and connect with others.

Improvements in accessibility (Goal 2) included:

- The installation of accessible a canoe/kayak launch at Kalamoir regional park (and plans for an additional one at Kaloya Regional Park).
- A paved trail and parking area that allows wheelchair users to access Shannon Lake and the park to participate in inter-generational “learn to fish” programs (help of an Enabling/Accessibility grant).
- In 2019, paving of the gravel surface at Mission Creek Regional Park will make the park more accessible year-round and connect with a playground for children (help of an Enabling/Accessibility grant).
- The Regional District contracts with the Community and Recreation Initiatives Society (CRIS) to increase inclusiveness. On regular scheduled park hikes, the CRIS team is there to assist those with mobility challenges. The CRIS team can take clients pretty much anywhere in the parks, including steep trails, tops of mountains and groomed easy trails.

By the end of 2018, approximately 10 of the 30 regional parks have been modified. The next phase will increase the number of trails that are accessible to older people, those recovering from a health condition, and those new to hiking and walking in some of the newly acquired parkland. The hope is that new park users will increase their confidence in trail walking and hiking by mastering the shorter, easier trails, and then try more difficult trails or even embark on multi-day trips. Another goal is to ensure there is enough selection for active recreation for all skills and abilities while balancing the area's conservation values.

RDCO is working towards establishing stronger partnerships with other regional districts, the province and the federal government, in offering recreational opportunities and increasing the public's understanding about the connections between nature and health. They are also working with West Bank First Nation and have in place a co-management agreement for Black Mountain / sntsk'il'ntən Regional Park and a Memorandum of Understanding for the protection of Indigenous Culture in Regional Parks. They are committed to ensuring Indigenous culture is respected in Regional Parks and have taken action to incorporate Indigenous languages and stories in interpretive information, and in park planning processes.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Keep things simple by putting yourself into the users' shoes. Talk with people and organizations that can help you achieve the Framework goals.
- Balance your values/mandates to provide quality recreation opportunities and maintain the cultural and conservation values of natural area parks.
- Provide quality, easy-to-understand signage, which encourages and allows people to find their way – a simple approach to encouraging participation.
- Think about how to make parks easy to get to for all, including people with lower incomes and without cars. This is important to park use and to keeping people active and healthy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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- RDCO Parks website: <https://www.regionaldistrict.com/your-services/parks-services.aspx>
- CRIS Website: <http://adaptiveadventures.ca/>

Framework Goal and Priority	Goal 3: Connecting People and Nature (Parks) Also addresses Goal 1: Active Living and Goal 2 Inclusion and Access
Population Addressed	All ages
Community	The Regional District of Central Okanagan includes five local communities: Kelowna, West Kelowna, Peachland, Lake Country, and the West Bank First Nation. Total population of 200,000 including West Bank First Nation (population 25,000)
Setting	Parkland in the Central Okanagan (over 2,000 hectares)
Lead Implementer and Organization	Parks Staff, Regional District of Central Okanagan
Key Partners	Community Recreation Initiatives Society (CRIS) Partner communities, West Bank First Nation, Community groups
Activity Focus	Enabling and encouraging the least active to walk on local trails, and to increase visits and participation in parks for people with accessibility barriers.
Stage of Development	Started in 2013/14; ongoing, expanding