

# 1.0 Executive Summary



## 1. Executive Summary

The Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) recognizes the value that parks and outdoor recreation contribute to the overall quality of life and sustainability of the region. Currently, the RDBN does not formally provide any parks or outdoor recreation services in rural areas. Existing parks and services in the rural areas are provided primarily by volunteer clubs, Recreation Sites & Trails BC, and BC Parks.

In recent years, demand for outdoor recreation opportunities in the RDBN has grown. At the same time, climate change impacts, such as beetle kill and forest fires, have created new challenges for maintaining trails and recreation areas. Many of the outdoor recreation areas and trails in the RDBN are maintained by volunteer clubs and it is becoming increasingly difficult for volunteer clubs to upkeep existing parks, trails, campsites, boat ramps, and other outdoor amenities.

To address these challenges, the RDBN initiated this Study to explore what a formal outdoor recreation service in the RDBN could look like and how the RDBN could provide a long-term, sustainable funding source to outdoor recreation clubs that operate and maintain popular recreation assets. The Study seeks to answer the following questions:

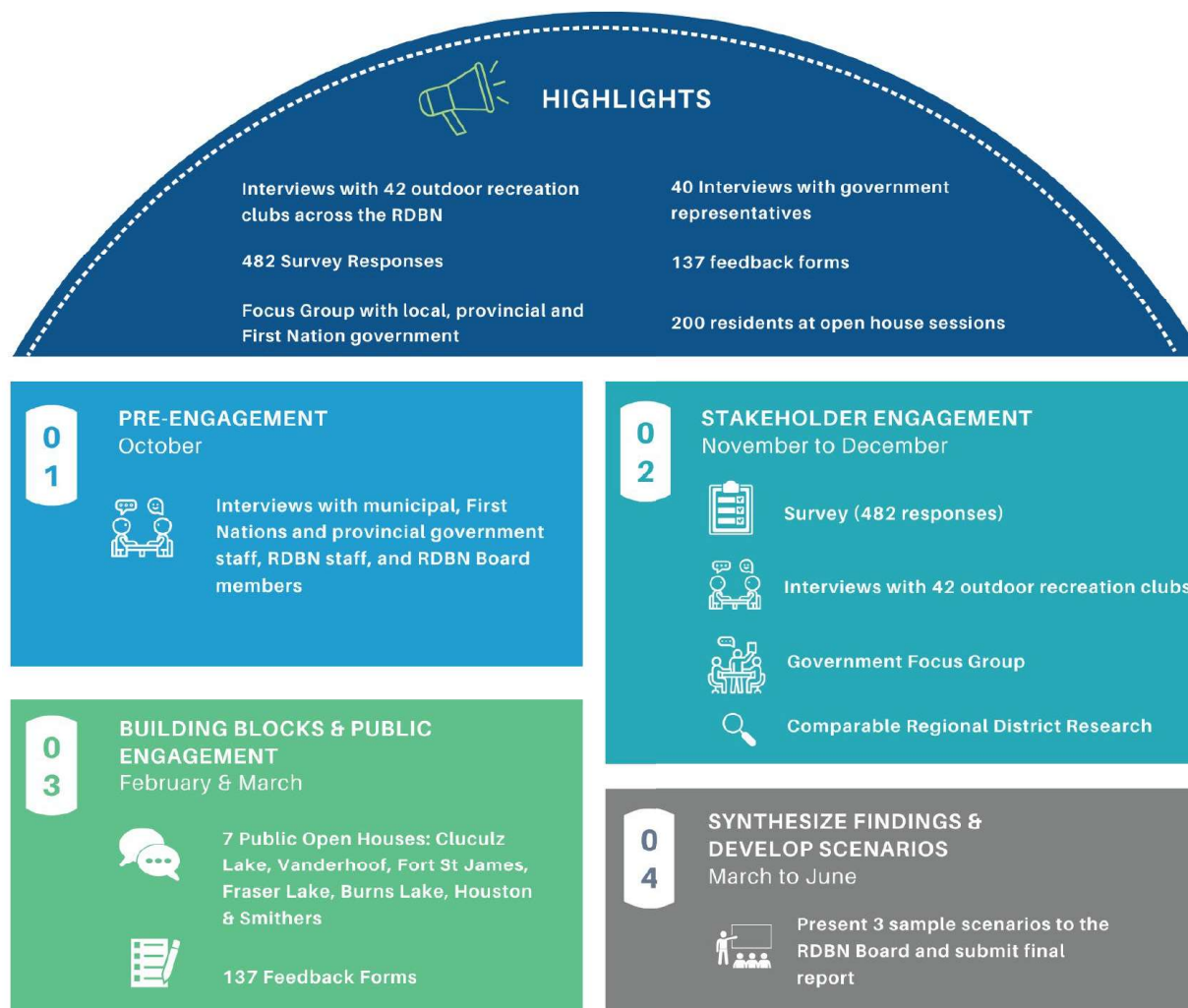
- **What are the outdoor recreation needs and demands across the RDBN? How do needs and demands differ across Electoral Areas?**
- **What is working well for existing volunteer recreation clubs and what are their challenges? How can the RDBN support volunteer clubs without stifling their enthusiasm and autonomy?**
- **What could an outdoor recreation service in the RDBN look like and what would it cost?**

Many regional districts (RDs) throughout B.C. provide parks and outdoor recreation services. Table 1 highlights the range of services and staff requirements for six RDs interviewed through this Study.

*Table 1: Comparable Regional Districts*

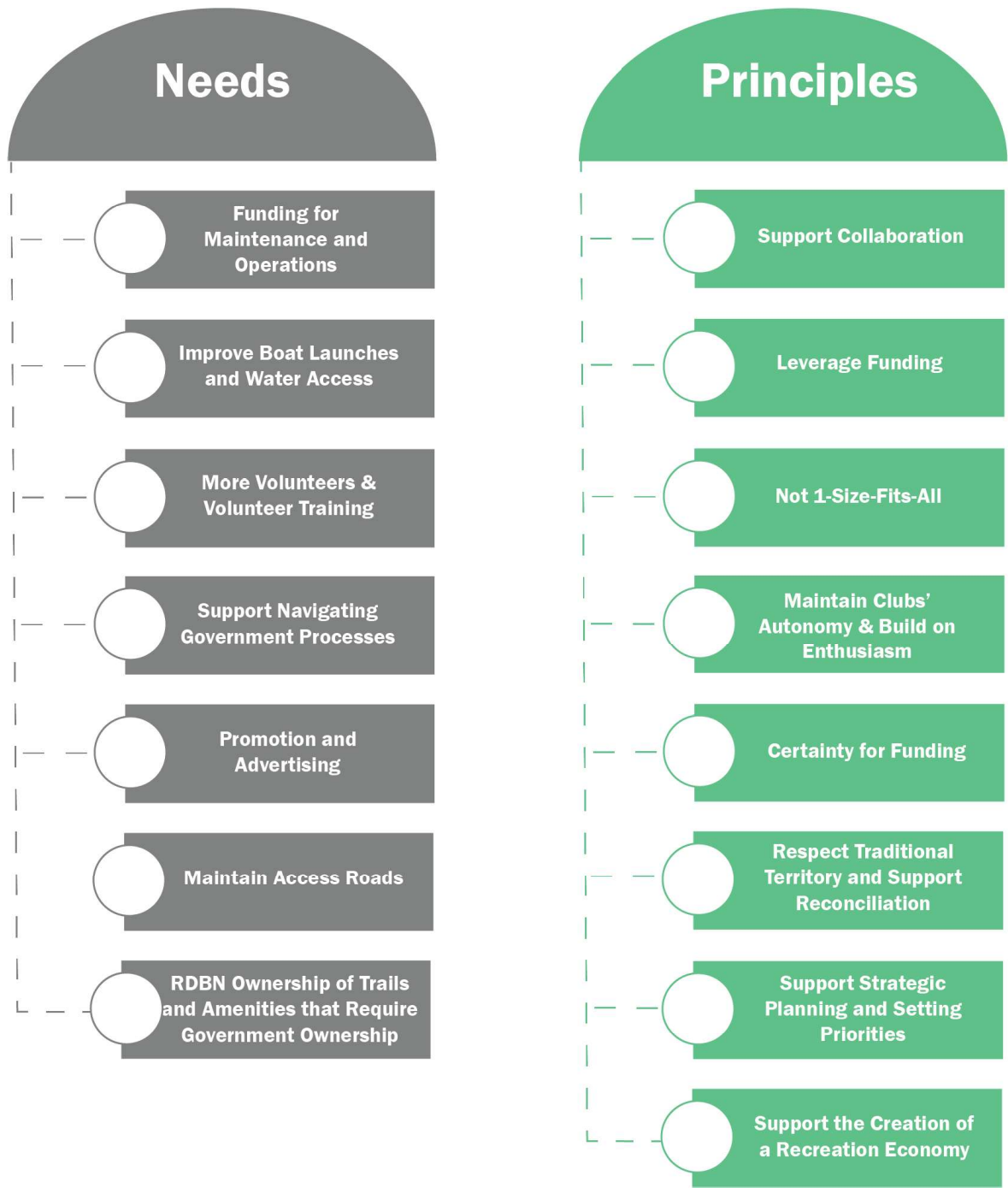
	Outdoor Recreation Assets	Full Time Employees (FTE)	Maintenance Management
RD East Kootenay	3 Regional Parks, 1 Exhibition Ground, 1 Boat Launch, 2 non-motorized trail corridors (11.4 km total), and 1 arena	1.8 FTE	RDEK employees and contractors
Columbia-Shuswap RD	Multiple Regional Parks, Trail Network, Multiple Neighbourhood Parks, Multiple MOTI Beach Access sites, 4 Boat Launches, 2 Campgrounds, 2 Bike Skills Park, and 3 indoor facilities	3.5 FTE	Contracts
Comox Valley RD	43 Parks, 14 Trail Corridors, 28 Beach Accesses, and 2 Boat Launches	5.2 FTE	Contracts
Strathcona RD	14 Parks, 3 Trail Corridors, 28 Beach Access Signs, RD Actively Maintains 4 Beach Accesses, 1 Boat Launch, 6 Community Docks	2 FTE	Contracts
Sunshine Coast RD	17 km of Paved Bike Paths, 71 km of Mapped Trails 9 Regional Parks, 17 Community Parks; 88 Green Spaces, 10 Neighbourhood parks, 3 tot lots, 6 Community Halls	9 FTE	SCRD employees
Peace River RD	5 Regional Parks, 1 Community Park, Exploring opportunities for trail development	1 FTE + seasonal maintenance staff	PRRD employees

This Study involved gathering feedback from outdoor recreation clubs, the general public, and other levels of government that deliver outdoor recreation services. The Study began in October 2019 and the primary engagement methods were a public online survey, interviews, a government focus group, and public open house sessions that included a feedback form. The diagram below provides an overview of the highlights from the engagement process.





Through the engagement in Phase 1 and 2, stakeholders consistently referenced seven common needs and eight principles (diagram below). These needs and principles were confirmed through the broader public engagement in Phase 3 and have served as a checklist in developing the sample scenarios for a RDBN outdoor recreation service outlined in Section 7 of this report.



With the information gathered from comparable RDs and through the Phase 1 and 2 engagement findings, the following "building blocks" were developed (illustrated below). The building blocks analogy seeks to break-down and define the various elements of an outdoor recreation service in order to facilitate dialogue about what a new service could look like. These building blocks are not intended to be exclusive of one another and can be combined into various scenarios for service delivery.



**The RDBN hires an employee(s) to administer an outdoor recreation service and coordinate with different levels of government, local non-profit organizations, and the public.**



**The RDBN provides funding to a non-profit society (or multiple societies) to deliver an outdoor recreation service.**



**The RDBN owns or leases outdoor recreation assets that are currently not being managed by any other level of government. Some examples of outdoor recreation assets that are in high demand include lake/river accesses, boat launches, and active transportation trails.**



**The RDBN establishes a grant program to provide maintenance funding to outdoor recreation clubs. Clubs apply for funding annually and the RDBN determines who receives funding.**



**The RDBN enters into multi-year agreements with outdoor recreation clubs to provide funding to maintain outdoor recreation amenities that clubs operate.**

As part of the public engagement, participants were asked to fill in feedback forms to share their thoughts on the building blocks. In total, 137 feedback forms were completed. **The information provided in feedback forms cannot be generalized to the broader public**, but taken into consideration with findings from interviews with clubs and responses to the online survey, we can glean the current level interest in a new outdoor recreation service. A detailed summary of engagement findings is available in Appendix I - What We Heard Report.

Generally, residents from Areas A and B expressed the strongest support for a new outdoor recreation service. Residents want a service that is focused on providing funding to outdoor recreation clubs, rather than being focused on administration and developing RDBN-owned and operated parks or trails. Participants from Areas A and B expressed strong support to provide funding for clubs through multi-year agreements rather than grants.

Although, there is a strong demand in Areas A and B to focus on providing funding to clubs, it is important to acknowledge that administering funding agreements and liaising with clubs requires administrative resources. In addition to this, there is demand for the RDBN to take over ownership of specific assets, such as the Cycle 16 trail from Smithers to Telkwa.

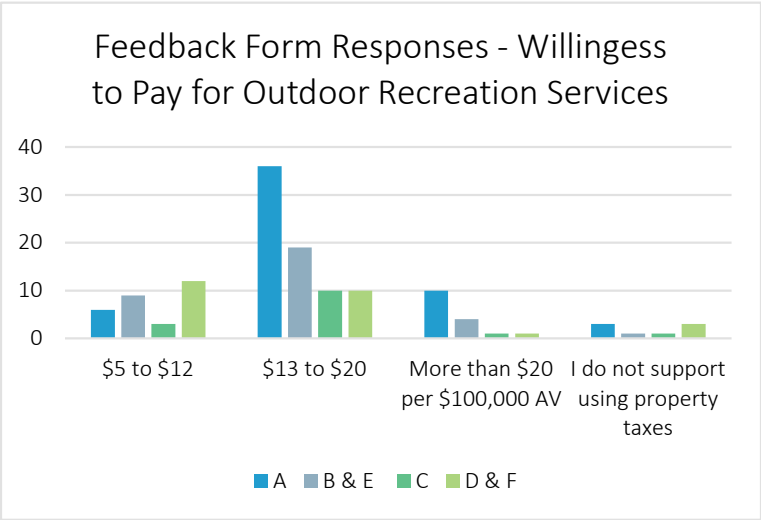
Area G has strong community champions who are supportive of establishing a new service, but there was limited broad community involvement in the Study (only 6 people attended the Houston open house and 26 people responded to the survey). Local clubs expressed support for multi-year funding agreements rather than grants.

The participation from Area E was limited, therefore the findings do not provide any insight into the level of support in that Electoral Area. Since starting this Study, Area E residents have expressed interest in having the RDBN own and operate a park on Francois Lake.

In Area C, D, and F there are strong outdoor recreation champions, but the level of community-wide support for a new outdoor recreation service is unclear. Area D and F have limited clubs currently operating. Area C has a variety of clubs and has expressed a need for support in working with the provincial government to formalize trails on Crown land.

Boat launches and river/lake access are contentious issues across the RDBN. Typically, these assets are not managed by a volunteer group and require a government body to lead development and maintenance.

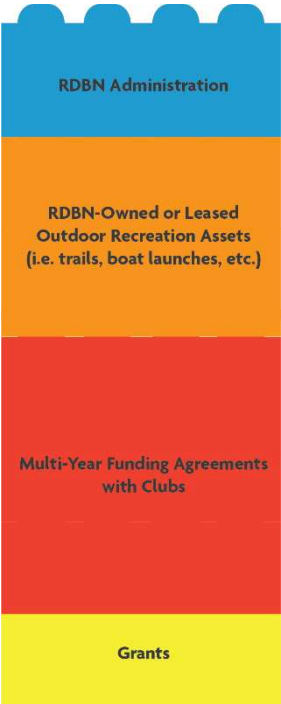
During the open house sessions residents were asked about their willingness to pay for a new service. Approximately 60% (75 people) of respondents supported a tax rate of \$13 to \$17 per \$100,000 of Assessed Value (AV). In Areas D and F, it was split: approximately half of the respondents (12 people) supported a lower rate of \$5 to \$8 per \$100,000 AV and slightly less than half of respondents (10 people) supported a tax rate of greater than \$13 per \$100,000 AV.



The findings and research in this Study have led to the development of three sample scenarios. These scenarios are described in further detail in Section 7. Each scenario has a sample budget to demonstrate potential costs and tax rates. There are endless scenarios and budget options, but these examples seek to meet the needs and principles identified through the engagement process, while exemplifying a range of service provision models.

**#1: Region-Wide Service with Municipal Contribution**

- All Electoral Areas & Municipalities
- 1.2 FTE
- Sample Annual Tax Requisition = \$739,000



**#2: Sub-Regional Area A, B & E Service with Municipal Contribution**

- A, Smithers, Telkwa. B, E, and Burns Lake
- 1.0 FTE
- Sample Annual Tax Requisition = \$438,000



**#3: Area A Service with Municipal Contribution**

- A, Smithers and Telkwa
- 0.75 FTE
- Sample Annual Tax Requisition = \$325,000



This Study started a dialogue across the RDBN about the idea of creating a new service for residents. Since starting the project, interest in the project has grown. The Study provides valuable information about what the RDBN’s needs and demands are and what an outdoor recreation service could look like and cost. However, it is important to continue the dialogue with key stakeholders, club representatives, and the general public as this project moves forward. Section 8 of this report includes recommendations for next steps and key questions that need to be answered as this work moves into future phases.