

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2020, the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) established a vision for delivering outdoor recreation across the regional district, and subsequently created a Parks and Trails Service Area and a Recreation Contribution Grant Service Area for Electoral Area C - Fort St. James Rural, as well as three other service areas. This Parks and Trails Master Plan is the first step in implementing these services for Electoral Area C, providing a framework for investment over the next 10 years.

The Parks and Trails Master Plan (the Plan) was developed in five phases from June 2025 through June 2026. Initial phases focused on understanding the inventory of existing parks and trails provided by others and engaging with stakeholders and the public to understand values, gaps and challenges. This review showed a strong foundation of parks and trails provided by the District of Fort St. James, BC Parks, Recreation Sites and Trails BC, and community organizations.

Across Electoral Area C, there are four-season trail networks for hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and ORV riding, as well as park amenities that support camping and access to lakes and rivers for swimming, fishing, and boating. Electoral Area C has a rich history of First Nations and settler heritage values, including the Fort St. James National Historic Site and the grease trails that are part of historic trade routes connecting from the Pacific Ocean to the interior.

Community-led outdoor recreation organizations have championed substantial initiatives, such as the Murray Ridge Ski Hill, going strong for nearly 50 years; the cross-country ski trails managed by the Stuart Lake Nordic Society; and the many kilometres of ORV trails south of town managed by the Fort St. James Snowmobile Club. Though their volunteer base is small, these organizations have made significant contributions to outdoor recreation opportunities through community organizing, fundraising, maintenance, and expansion projects.

Swimming, going to the lake, camping, hiking, and winter activities were the most popular among participants in the community survey. However, poor maintenance and a lack of information were mentioned as limiting the use of existing parks and trails. Engagement results showed that community priorities included new trail connections, improved amenities, and better information and signage, and revealed opportunities to expand lake access, enhance existing trails and connections, and strengthen partnerships.

Several challenges and gaps emerged, including limited volunteer capacity and challenges accessing funding and resources for ongoing maintenance and operations. There is unmet demand for safe and accessible walking and cycling connections, a need for better information about trails, and a growing concern around wildfire risks. One of the local trail networks used by the community for hiking and mountain biking, known as the Graveyard Trails, may not be secure in the long term without formalized planning and partnerships.

Combining the findings from the inventory and analysis, research on best practices, and community engagement, the Plan sets out an aspirational vision statement for parks and trails services and amenities over the next 10 years (2026-2036). The RDBN will contribute to parks and trails that build on community strengths, create safe connections, provide diverse and accessible recreation opportunities, and celebrate the region's natural beauty.

To help achieve the vision, a set of goals and recommendations was developed and is summarized on the following pages. The recommendations will be implemented incrementally as resources allow. Some initiatives will depend on external partnerships, regulatory approvals, and additional funding (i.e. grants). The Board's endorsement of the Master Plan indicates a preliminary agreement, without implying a financial commitment. The Board will make specific decisions regarding financial allocation as part of the financial planning process.



VISION STATEMENT

Over the next 10 years, the RDBN's Parks and Trails Service for Electoral Area C will:

- **Build on Community Strengths.** The RDBN seeks to build upon the strengths of the recreation services provided by others, including First Nations, BC Parks, Recreation Sites and Trails BC, and outdoor recreation organizations. These partnerships will create a cohesive and sustainable system that enhances the overall recreational experiences for all users.
- **Support the Creation of Safe Connections.** The parks and trails system in Electoral Area C will support connections between rural residents and Fort St. James, as well as connections to parks and key recreation destinations, focusing on accessible and multi-use linkages.
- **Provide Diverse and Accessible Recreation Opportunities.** The parks and trails system will offer diverse and accessible recreation options for all ages and abilities, leading to increased participation in outdoor activities, improved health and well-being for residents, and

enhanced tourism capacity. This will be achieved by building and maintaining new infrastructure and creating new or expanded parks, trails, and amenities to address gaps.

- **Celebrate the Region’s Natural Beauty.** The parks and trails system will facilitate access to lakes, shorelines, unique natural areas, historic sites and trails, and important community destinations. The parks and trails system will protect and enhance the rich ecosystems of the region, preserving opportunities for wildlife viewing and appreciation of native flora and fauna for future generations.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Five goals emerged to support the RDBN in achieving the vision for parks and trails. Each goal is linked to a set of action-oriented recommendations to enhance parks and trails in Electoral Area C across a 10-year period from 2026 to 2036.

- **Goal 1:** Establish tools and processes to support the delivery of the parks and trails service in Electoral Area C
- **Goal 2:** Strengthen partnerships and build community capacity
- **Goal 3:** Increase access to outdoor recreation
- **Goal 4:** Enhance the user experience at parks and trails
- **Goal 5:** Support active transportation and a connected community

A summary of the recommendations is provided on the following pages. Partnerships with other levels of government, First Nations, and community organizations will be critical to successful implementation. More information about resources required, partnerships, and collaboration is provided in the full Implementation Plan section of this report.

The Regional District Board’s endorsement of the Master Plan indicates a preliminary agreement, without implying a financial commitment. The Board will make specific decisions regarding financial allocation as part of the financial planning process.

	Recommendation	Priority
Goal 1: Establish tools and processes to support the delivery of the parks and trails service in Electoral Area C		
1.1	Continue to engage with other levels of government and community organizations to prioritize opportunities for the RDBN to provide parks and trails through partnerships, direct acquisition, and management.	High
1.2	Establish service levels and management plans for parks and trails, in line with the standards for other service areas.	High

1.3	Consider adding staff to support the implementation of parks and trails projects across the RDBN's four parks and trails service areas.	Medium
1.4	Continue to work with First Nations communities, other levels of government, and community groups to maintain and expand land use agreements.	Medium
Goal 2: Strengthen Partnerships and Build Capacity		
2.1	Continue to engage and build relationships with First Nations, including for the protection and enhancement of cultural and ecological values.	High
2.2	Continue to implement the Recreation Contribution Grant Program that provides allocation of multi-year funding to recreation organizations.	High
2.3	Continue to increase awareness of the RDBN's capacity to support outdoor recreation organizations.	High
2.4	Facilitate collaboration between outdoor recreation groups actively engaged in maintaining parks and trails features within Electoral Area C.	High
Goal 3: Increase access to outdoor recreation		
3.1	Explore opportunities for the RDBN to support BC Parks in improving access to Mount Pope trails and improve key amenities.	Medium
3.2	Explore opportunities to improve year-round access to Stuart Lake along Stones Bay Road.	Medium
3.3	Explore the potential for developing a small, water-access rustic campsite with basic amenities and a natural shoreline boat landing on the north shore of Stuart Lake.	High
3.4	Explore opportunities to coordinate with the District of Fort St. James to further develop the Mount Dickenson Trail.	High
3.5	Support intergovernmental collaboration to formalize and improve the Graveyard Trails network.	Low

3.6	Explore opportunities to partner with First Nations communities, local recreation organizations, and tourism organizations to create a long-term, shared vision for the Grease Trail network.	Low
3.7	Secure long-term access to recreation and tourism areas by working with the community to identify priority resource roads.	High
Goal 4: Enhance the user experience at parks and trails		
4.1	Follow accessibility standards, such as the Universal Design Guide by BC Parks, when establishing or upgrading parks and trails.	Medium
4.2	Lead the development of a cohesive mapping and information system for trail networks in the region. Update the RDBN's website to provide more information about trails.	High
4.3	Develop a naming policy for trails and look for opportunities to incorporate Indigenous stories and histories into interpretive signage along trails, where appropriate.	Medium
4.4	Support enhancements to the provincial RSTBC trails southwest of town, including those maintained by the Fort St. James Snowmobile Club.	High
4.5	Work with RSTBC to identify priority sites for increased maintenance and management.	Medium
Goal 5: Support active transportation and a connected community		
5.1	Advocate to the province to explore opportunities to connect communities and key recreation assets in Electoral Area C through the development of multi-use trails and pathways.	Dependent on proposed route