



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

DATE OF REPORT January 14, 2021
MEETING TYPE & DATE Regional Services Committee Meeting of January 27, 2021
FROM: Parks & Trails Division
Land Use Services Department
SUBJECT: 2020 Parks and Trails Visitation Summary
FILE:

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of 2020 public visitations and use of monitored Regional District parks and the Cowichan Valley Trail, as compared to visitation use trends from previous years.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

For information.

BACKGROUND

Public visitations are tracked at a cross-section of 20 CVRD Electoral Area and Regional parks and trails through the 40 different recording locations. Collection typically occurs at park and trail access points using infrared trail counters and/or passive vehicle counters.

The Park and Trail Visitation Program began in 2009 as a means to assess visitation use and trends through monitoring a cross selection of CVRD Electoral Area and Regional parks and trails. The information collected provides indicators of use applicable to unmonitored parks and trails managed by the CVRD through the Community and Regional Parks programs. Collected data is also utilized to guide planning and operations projects, determine maintenance levels and frequencies, and leverage successful grant funding for park and trail improvement projects. The sites currently managed under the Park and Trail Visitation Program have all been developed as long-term monitoring sites to provide certainty and confidence in data accuracy over time. For 2021 the long-term monitored sites are being expanded to include Lily Beach Park in Electoral Area F and Bald Mountain Uplands Park in Electoral Area I.

ANALYSIS

In 2020, the 20 monitored CVRD park and trail locations experienced an overall 34.2% increase (additional 377,760 visits) in annual visitations (1,581,242 recorded visits 2021), compared to recorded visits at the same sites in 2019 (Figure 1). Of note in the 2020 monthly summary is only one month (January 2020) had a decrease (-20.9%) in visitations compared to January 2019. The month of January 2020 also experienced significant rainfall (in the order of 240% compared to normal) which likely attributed to reduced public participation in outdoor recreation activities overall during this period.

Conversely, as noted in Figure 1, the subsequent 11 months of 2020 experienced a notable increase in use overall, even during the months of March and April when initial measures were being enacted to temporary closure of park amenities such as playgrounds and sport courts, and subsequent ongoing cancellation of park bookings (i.e. group shelters) and special events in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 1 – % changes in monthly visitation in 2020 compared to 2019

A summary of annual use at tracked CVRD park and trail locations is provided in Attachment A, which includes annual visitations for years prior extending back to 2017 for sites monitored. As noted in the attachment, some monitored parks experienced a decrease in 2020 compared to 2019 (Saltair Centennial Park, Shawnigan Hills Athletic Park and Yellow Point Park). Saltair Centennial Park and Shawnigan Hills Athletic Park have bookable sports fields, which in 2020 were not available for use to sport teams or league play, which likely contributed to reduced park visitations for the year. There are, however, no apparent factors for the decrease in monitored use at Yellow Point Park (counter located on trail at main parking lot) in 2020 over the two previous years.

While factors associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (inclusive of provincial health authority guidelines encouraging spending time outdoors, restrictions/limitations on travel, personal time otherwise available to recreate) can certainly be attributed to increased visitations to CVRD monitored parks and trails in 2020, longer term monitoring is also indicating year over year trends in increased park and trail visitations at monitored sites (See Attachment A).

Of note also with monitoring data collected is the ability to compile and assess daily and hourly use information to identify patterns of use and trends. As examples, Figures 2 and 3 provide days of the week use averages comparisons between 2019 and 2020 for Bright Angel Park and the Cowichan Valley Trail at Sherman Road. Of note for both these sites is that daily use levels are fairly consistent throughout the week, with the exception being a bump in overall average use on Sundays. Similar consistent levels of weekly park and trail use is seen at other monitored locations, with the exceptions being Old Baldy Mountain Park, Spectacle Lake Park, Stoney Hill Regional Park and the Cowichan Valley Trail access (Glen Eagles Road) to the historic Kinsol Trestle. These monitored sites consistently experienced notably higher visitations/use on weekends, which is not unexpected for these sites which have a regional-destination appeal.

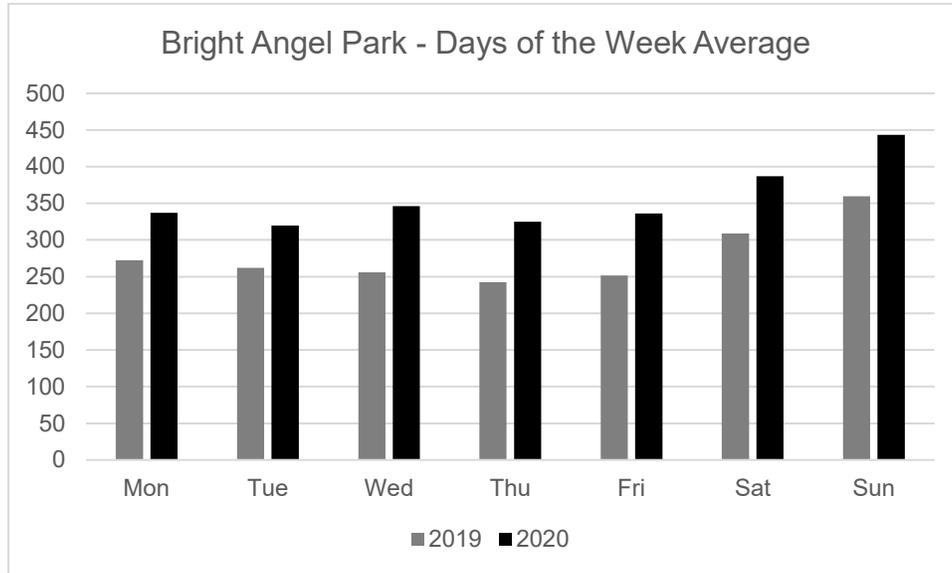


Figure 2 – Bright Angel Park – Days of the Week Average comparison between 2019 and 2020

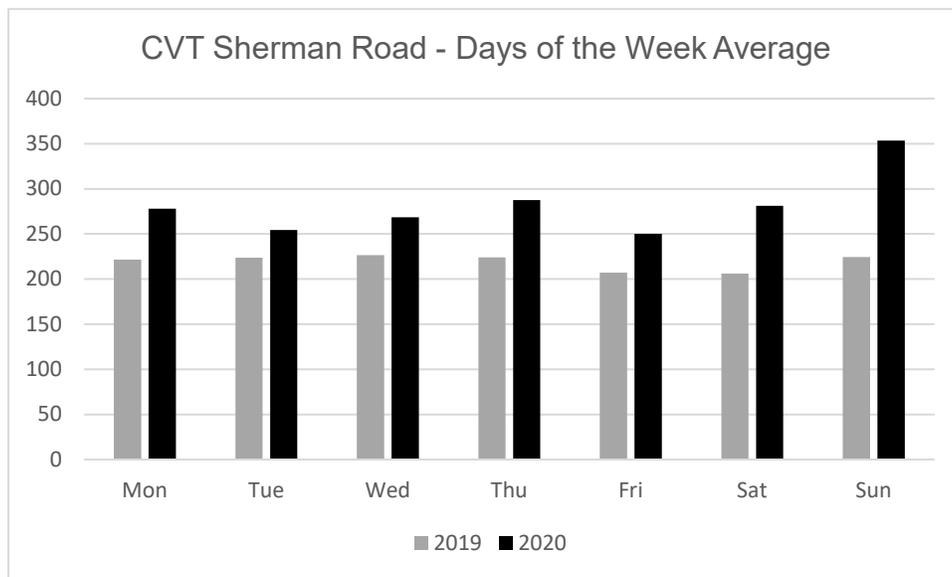


Figure 3 – CVT Sherman Road – Days of the Week Average comparison between 2019 and 2020

Data collected from monitored park and trail sites will continue to provide indicators of overall public visitation and use of CVRD’s Community and Regional Parks and can assist with projecting operation/maintenance activity requirements, future park planning and associated decisions with regard to provision of service levels and extent of park/trail improvement considerations relative to emerging use trends.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Each infrared trail or vehicle counting location includes a counting unit (\$600), security box (\$50-\$150), and ongoing maintenance, including batteries and silica gel packs (to control moisture). Annual park operations budgets include funds for maintenance, repair and replacement of active counters.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

Not Applicable

Referred to (upon completion):

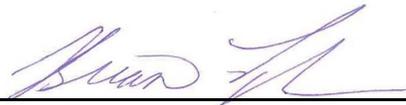
- Communications & Engagement
- Community Services *(Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Emergency Management, Facilities & Transit)*
- Corporate Services *(Finance, Human Resources, Legislative Services, Information Technology, Procurement)*
- Engineering Services *(Environmental Services, Recycling & Waste Management, Water Management)*
- Land Use Services *(Community Planning, Development Services, Inspection & Enforcement, Economic Development, Parks & Trails)*

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Manager, Legislative Services

Financial Considerations:

Manager, Finance

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – 2020 Park and Trail Visits