

Abbotsford home to Sumas Mountain Interregional Park

The model is a first for B.C.

BY CHRISTINA TOTH, THE TIMES MAY 24, 2012



Holding four cedar pieces carved from the same block, symbolizing a promise of unity, are Chilliwack mayor Sharon Gaetz, left, Abbotsford Mayor Bruce Banman, Sumas First Nations council member Jackie Bird and Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore, also chair of Metro Vancouver. The regions will jointly manage Sumas Mountain Interregional Park, where the announcement was held on May 22.

Photograph by: Christina Toth, Abbotsford Mission Times

As a cold moist fog whirled around them Tuesday afternoon, Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley Regional District park planners, politicians and Sto:lo leaders gathered at Inspiration Point high above Matsqui Prairie to announce a collaborative partnership to manage the 1,471-hectare Sumas Mountain Interregional Park, the first such jointly directed park in British Columbia.

"Today's announcement is a result of a multi-agency collaboration.

Without the efforts of all those involved, the creation of Sumas Mountain Interregional Park would not have been possible," said Chilliwack Mayor Sharon Gaetz, who is also the FVRD chair.

With the park area already a green haven for local residents and wildlife, including more than 40 species at risk such as the peregrine falcon and mountain beaver, "the joining of the two regional districts' efforts will ensure that the area's rich ecosystem is preserved and continues to thrive," she said. "My kids' kids' kids will be able to experience this park and I am very excited."

Metro Vancouver, which maintains the regional parks in Abbotsford, and the FVRD, which manages Sumas Mountain Regional Park, have sorted out their roles and responsibilities and formed an agreement to protect and enhance the Sumas Mountain conservation and recreation area.

The interregional park is not entirely a new creation.

It is comprised of two discrete land parcels that include the existing Sumas provincial and regional parks under FVRD jurisdiction on the east flank of Sumas Mountain, and parks and other green space under the control or ownership of Metro Vancouver and the City of Abbotsford on the mountain's west side. Abbotsford has contributed 207 hectares.

The total area is more than four Stanley Parks, said Gaetz.

What is new is the collaborative nature of the plans for the parkland, and any future lands that will be added to it.

Each district will continue to be responsible for the management of land in its jurisdiction, but what happens on the parks and the introduction of new programs will be overseen collaboratively.

The historic agreement, signed in September 2011, also brings in support from Sumas First Nations and the Sto:lo Nation, who view the mountain as their cultural home.

The First Nations have interest in logging on Crown land adjacent to the park, but in sustainable ways that should work with the common vision for the mountain, said Dave Schaepe, an archaeologist with the Sto:lo.

Sumas Mountain Interregional Park becomes the eastern anchor for Metro Vancouver's 33 regional parks and will make a seamless connection to FVRD's parks and trails, said Greg Moore, Port Coquitlam's mayor and Metro Vancouver chairman.

For example, Metro Vancouver intends to connect its Matsqui Trail Park, which runs parallel to the river from Mount Lehman to the base of Sumas Mountain to the mountain park.

In addition, SMIP will become a central component in the Experience the Fraser program, a "bold vision" being developed by FVRD, Metro Vancouver and the province to link natural, cultural, historic and recreational amenities with trails and campsites along the river from Hope to the Georgia Strait, he said.

"The province recently provided the regional districts \$1 million and completed a memorandum of understanding to advance the Experience the Fraser," Moore added.

"We look forward to developing with the FVRD an overarching park plan which engages all interests. It's our goal to make Sumas Mountain Interregional Park one of the most loved parks in British Columbia."

Abbotsford's mayor Bruce Banman noted the cooperative aspect in ensuring the park's existence for current and future residents.

As Abbotsford grows, "it is critical we make investments like this one [to] pass along the legacy of green space to the next generation," he said.

Several current and past directors and park planners were present for the official announcement of SMIP, which was developed in earnest over the past six years.

Now the real work to manifest the vision begins, said Siri Bertelsen, FVRD director of regional programs.

"We've already started a working group to develop a master plan" with regional district and Sto:lo members, she said.

Eventually they will be getting input from stakeholder groups, such as the naturalists, hikers and mountain bikers who already frequent the mountain trails.

For more about the Experience the Fraser, see metrovanancouver.org.

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