

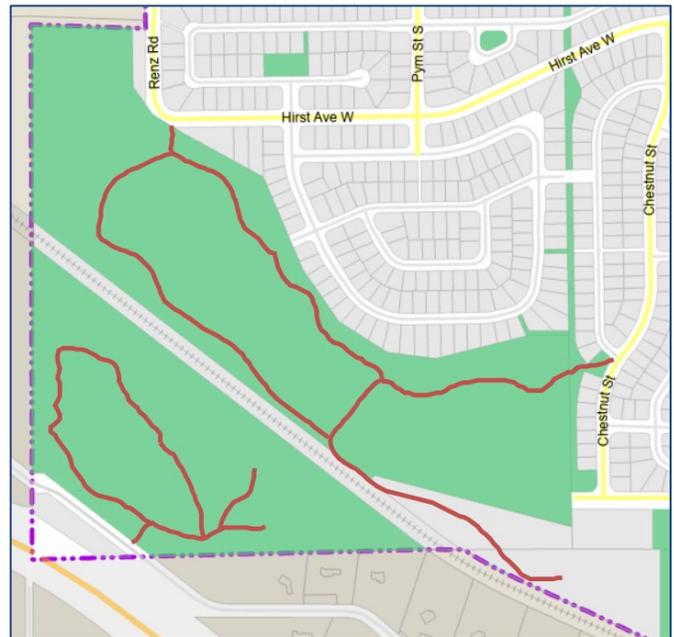
## City Continues Parksville Wetlands Trail Upgrades

As climate change makes our summers drier, it is critical the City provides suitable access in the Parksville Wetlands and surrounding areas for maintenance, emergency access and safe egress for ambulance and fire protection. Development of a trail system within the Parksville Wetlands is a priority for the City. It is also important to provide formal access for users of all ages and abilities to enjoy our parks.

Over the past two summers, we experienced a grass fire of about 700 square metres and a fire which burned a section of the wetlands in a more treed area. Without safe emergency access, the potential for loss within our wetlands and the risk to nearby residential areas is very high. The section of park south of the railway contains almost 200 dead standing trees. City staff are now able to safely access the site to mitigate the hazards from trees and remove dead wood based on our Urban Forest Strategy to manage fire fuel load maximums for the area. Significant replanting occurs annually in the City of Parksville with 3,000 trees planted in 2021 and about 7,300 trees planted over the past three years.

Currently, crews are completing a loop on the north side of the railway line through the wetlands, connecting the Hirst/Renz corner to the end of Despard Avenue. This will complete a 2.3-kilometre loop trail within this side of the wetlands. This section of the park was cleared entirely a few decades ago as part of the Ermineskin subdivision and is made up mostly of pioneer species such as grasses, red alder, deciduous shrubs, and some shore pine.

Staff developed a standard for Parksville trails which is used for both vehicle access and as accessible, pedestrian friendly trails. By combining techniques developed at the Municipal Insurance Agency of BC along with the Whistler trail standards created by the Regional Municipality of Whistler, staff constructed a double track trail at a five-metre width. Lesser trails developed off this double track trail will reduce to two metres in width and are for pedestrian use only.



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When building trails, staff take into consideration the equalization of water in the park, have kept the trail to higher ground as much as possible and avoided all pond areas. Retention of as many conifers as possible is a priority. Permaculture methods such as hügelkultur have been employed to ease fire concerns and planting berms along the trail. The berms are built from woody debris and soil excavated from the trail bed. The gradual decay of the wood sequesters carbon in the soil, provides for aeration of the soil, makes for a consistent long-term supply of nutrients, and stores water better through periods of drought. The berms help manage the water in the wetlands by keeping it in ponding areas while also keeping pedestrians and their dogs on the trail. The trail built in 2019 connecting Renz Road to Chestnut, demonstrates how the trail re-naturalizes in a few short months and how popular these trails have become.

Response to the City's work in the wetlands has been positive; the bright limestone capped areas help the visually impaired and the new parking areas on Coldwater Road provide mobility access. Culverts were installed at regular intervals to help equalize the water throughout the park and there is now a solid, dry base for walking. Sightlines are more open providing good visibility and improved comfort if walking alone. A small City crew of staff has completed almost three kilometres of five-metre-wide emergency/maintenance/accessible trails in less than six months.

For those using the park, please respect signage which advises of any trail closures or urban forest restoration areas. Please respect the natural wildlife and plants in the park and always keep dogs on the trails and on leash.

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**For more information:**

Deb Tardiff, Manager of Communications  
[dtardiff@parksville.ca](mailto:dtardiff@parksville.ca); 250 954-3073

