

# Report

Date February 10, 2026  
Subject Draft Biodiversity Protection Policy Report

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## PURPOSE

To present, jointly with Diamond Head Consulting, a draft of the North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy report to the Committee of the Whole, and to receive feedback and comments prior to finalizing the report.

## BACKGROUND

On June 21, 2021, a workshop was held at the Committee of the Whole to discuss biodiversity in North Cowichan. After this meeting, on October 7, 2021, staff were directed by Council to work with a consultant to develop a Biodiversity Protection Policy for North Cowichan with two components:

- An assessment report of current biodiversity resources and their status in North Cowichan, and,
- A policy report providing options for management polices and actions to protect, enhance, and restore biodiversity in North Cowichan.

To prepare for the assessment report, staff initiated a program to consult the community through an online forum, which provided a means to:

- discuss biodiversity questions with staff,
- identify important biodiversity hotspots in the community, and,
- describe actions that North Cowichan could adopt to support biodiversity.

At the Council meeting on May 17, 2023, North Cowichan staff received direction from Council to include a discussion of trail impacts and recommendations on trail management policy with the project reporting.

At the same time, staff engaged local First Nations to identify existing and past biodiversity features and their priorities for protection and restoration. During 2022 and 2023, the project consultant, Diamond Head Consulting, developed a biodiversity assessment report. A draft version of the biodiversity assessment was provided to Council on June 13, 2023, and the Environmental Advisory Committee on June 27, 2023, for review and comment. Substantial completion of the assessment report was deemed to be a requirement before starting work on the policy report.

During a climate adaptation/biodiversity workshop with First Nations staff in October 2023, North Cowichan staff were informed that direct engagement with First Nations communities and/or Elders would be required to meet the engagement criteria, as interpreted under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. To achieve this, North Cowichan staff worked with individual First Nations (Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation) on several occasions to request engagement sessions with Elders and/or their respective

community members. Since that time, North Cowichan staff have held engagement sessions with Elders from Penelakut Tribe and Halalt First Nation. A full description of First Nations engagement on biodiversity now appears in the final assessment report.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Context and Framing of Biodiversity Policy in North Cowichan***

The policy report by Diamond Head Consulting draws upon best practices recognized by Qualified Environmental Specialists in British Columbia within the existing biodiversity context of North Cowichan, established by the assessment report. The foundation for biodiversity strategy in the report lies in five elements:

- North Cowichan biodiversity assessment report,
- North Cowichan Official Community Plan Update (2022),
- North Cowichan environmental policy review (2021),
- First Nations engagement, and,
- North Cowichan community consultation.

Tactically, Diamond Head Consulting and staff have developed policies and actions that make sense for North Cowichan given the context of:

- Biodiversity resources in North Cowichan,
- Federal and Provincial legislation (eg. Riparian Areas Protection Regulation (Prov), *Wildlife Act* (Prov), *Water Sustainability Act* (Prov), *Environmental Management Act* (Prov), *Pesticide Control Act*, *Weed Control Act* (Prov), *Migratory Birds Act* (Can), *Oceans Act* (Can), *Fisheries Act* (Can) *Farm Practices Protection Act* (Prov)),
- Bylaws that North Cowichan uses to protect, enhance, and restore biodiversity,
- Programs that currently exist in North Cowichan to protect, enhance, and restore biodiversity, and,
- Collaborations with other governments and First Nations on biodiversity actions.

### ***Biodiversity Policy: Vision → Goals → Policies/Actions***

The biodiversity policy report uses the vision and environmental goals established by the 2022 Official Community Plan as a foundation for defining biodiversity goals and, from those goals, for developing policies and actions to achieve each goal. The Vision Statement from the Official Community Plan is:

*North Cowichan's unique communities are set in spectacular natural environments defined by forests, rivers, lakes, coastline and farmland. As a steward and leader of environmental and social well-being, we will prioritize the conservation of our natural areas, provide supports for a thriving local economy and foster resilient, welcoming and inclusive communities. Our decisions and relationships will be collaborative, transparent, and demonstrate resilience in the face of future challenges and opportunities.*

The 2022 Official Community Plan also included the following environmental goals:

- Protect, connect, and regenerate ecosystems and mitigate threats to biodiversity,
- Recognize and protect the special characteristics of marine areas, and,
- Identify and connect ecologically sensitive lands and natural areas.

The Official Community Plan vision and goals thus serve as the foundation for the development of six biodiversity goals:

- Integrate biodiversity protection into urban growth and land use planning,
- Protect and enhance watercourses and their riparian areas,
- Protect and enhance terrestrial ecosystems,
- Protect and enhance marine and shoreline ecosystems,
- Provide and manage a trail network that maintains the ecological integrity of natural areas, and,
- Strengthen education, stewardship, and knowledge to support biodiversity protection.

Each of these goals has accompanying policies and actions that not only recommend new policies and work but also acknowledge North Cowichan policies, actions and programs that are either in place or under development, for example:

- The Quamichan Lake Water Quality Program,
- Parrot's Feather Control in Somenos Creek,
- Somenos Lake water quality monitoring,
- The natural assets management program,
- The Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society Service Agreement, and,
- North Cowichan's invasive plant species management program.

The draft Biodiversity Protection Policy includes a list of all policies and actions recommended for each goal.

### ***Next Steps and Implementation***

Council has sought comments and recommendations from the Environmental Advisory Committee on the Biodiversity Protection Policy as this project has progressed. Staff feel it is appropriate to seek feedback from the Committee at this stage, to be consistent and to recognize the value of the Committee. The next available meeting of the Environmental Advisory Committee is February 26.

Upon acceptance of the final version of the Biodiversity Protection Policy report and Council's direction, staff will prepare an implementation plan for the policies and actions outlined in the report. Many policies and actions in the report are already in place or under development in North Cowichan, while other proposed policies may require additional resources, including financial and/or staff. An implementation report will provide Council with an assessment of the resources and timeline for three types of action and policies listed in the report:

- work already underway towards biodiversity policy goals,

- work and policies that are in development, and,
- a forecast of the resources and time required to achieve policies and actions not underway or in development.

## OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to:
  1. Refer the draft Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy, prepared by Diamond Head Consulting and dated February 2026, to the upcoming Environmental Advisory Committee meeting for comment.
  2. Consider and incorporate the Environmental Advisory Committee comments, to the extent reasonably practical, into the final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy.
  3. Incorporate the following Committee of the Whole comments into the final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy:
    - i. [insert comments]
    - ii. ...
    - iii. ...
  4. Present a final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy to Council for adoption in June 2026.
    - This option allows the policy report to be reviewed by community members with environmental expertise.
    - This option will increase the timeline for completing the report by a few weeks.
  
2. THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to work with Diamond Head Consultants to incorporate the following comments and suggestions on the draft Biodiversity Protection Policy report arising from the Committee of the Whole meeting held on February 10, 2026, and to finalize the report:
  - i. [insert comments]
  - ii. ...
  - iii. ...
  - This option would expedite completion of the report for use by North Cowichan staff as a policy and planning document.
  - This option does not provide an opportunity for additional feedback from the Environmental Advisory Committee, despite earlier referrals.

## IMPLICATIONS

Both the Biodiversity Protection Policy and Biodiversity Protection Assessment reports represent a significant achievement in delivering on Council's environmental strategic priority. These documents identify biodiversity assets and goals, and provide a pathway to achieving them.

The First Nations biodiversity engagement process, initiated upon completion of the assessment report, provides a key component in delivering the goals identified in the policy report.

The goals and actions in the Biodiversity Protection Policy report can be of immediate use to North Cowichan in developing new programs for use by several departments including: Parks, Planning, and Engineering.

The completion of the Biodiversity Protection Policy report will facilitate implementation of environmental goals identified in the 2022 Official Community Plan update.

Trail management and best practices identified in the policy report address a directive from Council and will help develop trail management policies for the Municipal Forest Reserve.

**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to:

1. Refer the draft Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy, prepared by Diamond Head Consulting and dated February 2026, to the upcoming Environmental Advisory Committee meeting for comment.
2. Consider and incorporate the Environmental Advisory Committee comments, to the extent reasonably practical, into the final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy.
3. Incorporate the following Committee of the Whole comments into the final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy:
  - i. [insert comments]
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4. Present a final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy to Council for adoption in June 2026.

Report prepared by:



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Dave Preikshot, PhD, RPBio  
Senior Environmental Specialist

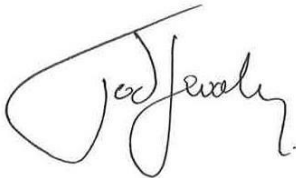
Report reviewed by:



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David Conway, PEng  
Director, Subdivision and Environmental Services

**Approved to be forwarded to Council:**



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Ted Swabey  
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

- (1) Biodiversity Protection Policy Report DRAFT
- (2) Biodiversity Protection Policy Staff Presentation CoW
- (3) Biodiversity Assessment Report