

Report

Date	April 1, 2026	File:
Subject	Feedback from Environmental Advisory Committee on Draft Biodiversity Policy Report	

PURPOSE

To seek direction from Council on the feedback received from a meeting of the Environmental Advisory Committee, held on February 26, 2026, regarding the draft Biodiversity Policy Report.

BACKGROUND

The Committee of the Whole received the draft Biodiversity Protection Policy Report and presentation during the February 10, 2026, meeting. At this meeting, the Committee of the Whole passed the following resolution:

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 comments collected by the Senior Environmental Specialist at the Committee of the Whole meeting into the final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy.*
- 4. Present a final Municipality of North Cowichan Biodiversity Protection Policy to Council for adoption in June 2026.*

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) met on February 26, 2026, and discussed the Biodiversity Protection Policy Report. At this meeting, the EAC passed the following resolution:

THAT the Environmental Advisory Committee recommends to Council that:

- 1. Staff work with Diamond Head Staff to incorporate comments and suggestions, recorded at the February 26, 2026 Environmental Advisory Committee meeting, into the Draft Biodiversity Protection Policy and for North Cowichan staff to present the revised version of the draft Biodiversity Protection policy to Council, for adoption.*
- 2. Staff return to the Environmental Advisory Committee to continue to work on developing the implementation plan including quantitative monitoring and evaluation.*

The draft minutes are included for reference as Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

The EAC reviewed the draft Biodiversity Protection Policy and provided detailed feedback regarding policy scope, clarity, implementation, and monitoring. Committee members expressed support for the direction of the policy and acknowledged the value of consolidating existing initiatives and biodiversity-related work into a single document. Members requested further refinement before the policy is presented to Council for adoption.

Several comments focused on strengthening the policy's treatment of terrestrial ecosystems, forest protection, and habitat connectivity. Members noted that forest ecosystems represent a significant proportion of North Cowichan's land base and recommended that the policy more explicitly address forest conservation, climate change impacts such as cedar decline, and the relationship between biodiversity management and wildfire resilience. Committee members also discussed the need to identify and protect wildlife refuge areas and habitat corridors, particularly in areas experiencing recreational pressure from extensive trail networks. Suggestions included decommissioning inactive trails, improving alignment between the policy and existing wildfire planning, and strengthening language related to riparian protection and habitat management.

Committee members discussed how biodiversity considerations could be more effectively integrated into land use planning and development processes. Recommendations included identifying priority habitat hubs and corridors in advance of development, strengthening development permit area guidelines to support habitat protection and connectivity, and updating subdivision and servicing bylaws to better incorporate green infrastructure and naturalized stormwater management approaches. Members also encouraged greater alignment with existing municipal tools, such as tree protection measures and urban containment policies, to maintain ecosystem connectivity within growth areas.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on implementation, monitoring, and performance measurement. Several members noted that while the draft policy outlines broad goals and actions, it currently lacks clearly defined indicators, targets, and baseline data to measure progress. Committee members recommended developing measurable indicators tied to specific policy actions, such as the amount of land protected, the number of trees retained through development approvals, or engagement with private landowners on restoration initiatives. Members also highlighted the importance of distinguishing between ecological condition monitoring and policy effectiveness monitoring, noting that measurable implementation metrics would allow Council to track progress over time.

Committee members noted the importance of prioritization and resource planning. The current draft contains mostly qualitative actions, but members advised that the implementation plan should identify goals, anticipated costs, and achievable timelines to support Council decision-making. Members also recommended that the policy more clearly articulate the economic benefits associated with biodiversity protection, including the role of natural assets in reducing climate-related risks such as flooding and drought, as well as the potential for incentives and partnerships with private landowners to support restoration and conservation activities.

Additional suggestions included improving clarity through a glossary of key ecological terms, strengthening references to First Nations interests and participation in biodiversity stewardship, and clarifying language in several policy sections (e.g., riparian setback requirements and trail relocation near watercourses). Members also suggested incorporating available ecological data and monitoring efforts undertaken by regional organizations and stewardship groups to better support evidence-based decision-making.

The Committee generally supported continuing work on the policy and recommended that staff incorporate the feedback received and return to Council with a revised draft alongside an implementation plan. Members indicated that the implementation plan should include prioritization of actions and the development of quantitative monitoring and evaluation measures.

When the Biodiversity Protection Policy returns to Council for adoption, staff will seek direction to prepare an Implementation Plan. It would be proposed that this Implementation Plan receive EAC input before returning to Council for adoption.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council direct staff to implement recommendations from the Environmental Advisory Committee meeting of February 26, 2026, as outlined in the April 1, 2026 report from the Senior Environmental Specialist, in the final Biodiversity Protection Policy for adoption by Council's and that, after adoption of the report by Council, staff work with the Environmental Advisory Committee to develop an Implementation Plan for the Biodiversity Protection Policy.
 - This option allows staff to quickly finalise the Biodiversity Policy Report in order to commence work on an implementation report that is aided by engagement with the EAC on defining goals and assessing time frames and costs for actions identified in the Biodiversity Policy Report.
2. THAT Council direct staff to implement the following recommendations from the Environmental Advisory Committee meeting of February 26, 2026, in the final Biodiversity Protection Policy for adoption by Council [...*Council to identify*].
 - This option allows Council to identify the EAC recommendations to include in the Biodiversity Protection Policy and allows staff to complete the Biodiversity Policy Report and begin preparation of an implementation report defining goals and assessing time frames and costs for actions identified in the Biodiversity Policy Report.
3. THAT Council receive the report from the Senior Environmental Specialist dated April 1, 2026, for information.
 - This option allows staff to quickly finalise both the Biodiversity Policy Report and take no further action.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment:

Adopting the recommendation would advance the development of a comprehensive municipal framework for biodiversity protection. Incorporating the Committee's feedback is expected to strengthen policy language related to habitat protection, ecological connectivity, forest conservation, and riparian management. Improved integration of biodiversity considerations into land use planning, trail management, and development processes would help reduce habitat fragmentation and support ecosystem resilience.

Social:

The policy development process supports community stewardship and public awareness regarding the relationship between land use decisions and ecological health. Strengthening biodiversity protections may improve recreational experiences, environmental education opportunities, and the long-term health of local watersheds and forests. The policy also has implications for relationships with First Nations, as biodiversity protection intersects with cultural values, traditional ecological knowledge, and land stewardship practices. Continued collaboration with First Nations partners will be important to ensure the policy aligns with reconciliation commitments.

Financial:

In the short term, additional staff time and resources will be required to incorporate feedback, refine the policy, and develop an implementation plan that includes prioritization, monitoring indicators, and performance measures. Depending on Council direction, future actions arising from the implementation plan could involve new program funding, updates to municipal bylaws, or additional staffing resources to support monitoring and enforcement activities.

Governance:

The recommendation commits staff to additional work prior to final adoption of the policy. This includes incorporating Committee feedback into the draft policy and developing a more detailed implementation framework that identifies priorities, timelines, and monitoring approaches. The recommendation also anticipates continued collaboration between staff and the EAC to refine implementation measures and evaluation metrics.

RECOMMENDATION

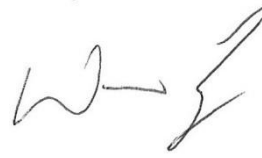
THAT Council direct staff to implement recommendations from the Environmental Advisory Committee meeting of February 26, 2026, as outlined in the April 1, 2026 report from the Senior Environmental Specialist, in the final Biodiversity Protection Policy for adoption by Council and that, after adoption of the report by Council, staff work with the Environmental Advisory Committee to develop an Implementation Plan for the Biodiversity Protection Policy.

Report prepared by:



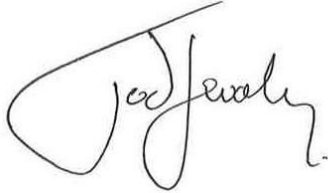
Dave Preikshot, PhD, RPBio
Senior Environmental Specialist

Report reviewed by:



David Conway PEng
Director, Subdivision and Environmental Services

Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment:

- (1) Draft February 26, 2026, EAC minutes