

Gabriola Sounder, March 18, 2020, p.2  
Regarding the RDN Homeless Camping Bylaw

Dear Editor

Regarding the proposed changes to Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) park use regulation bylaws that would allow homeless camping in, among other parks, Gabriola's 707 Community Park (707), I note with some concern that restrictions to such camping do not prohibit camping in riparian areas.

This is especially relevant because the RDN is proposing, short-sightedly in my opinion, to append to the 707, land to the east of Coats Marsh Regional Park that was acquired in the Williamson & Associates density swap of 2019. This proposal, if not yet a fact, will create a regulatory boundary that runs right through the eastern part of the shallow-water wetland in the Regional Park, a concern currently being addressed by the Local Trust Committee as part of their Ecological Protection Zone (P4) initiative. By deeming part of the "lake" to be deserving of the highest level of ecological protection, and part to be just an extension of the 707 makes no ecological sense whatsoever.

While making the environmentally sensitive parts of Coats Marsh East essentially subject to the same regulations as Coats Marsh Regional Park, which is jointly owned by the RDN and The Nature Trust of BC, cannot be achieved for administrative reasons by expanding the boundaries of Coats Marsh Regional Park - the same result from the environmental point-of-view could be achieved by making Coats Marsh East a new community park, separate from the 707, but with similar but separate rules for trail usage away from sensitive areas. We could then have the RDN declare this new park off-limits for camping, thereby protecting the "lake" and its waterfowl and beaver habitat, and the riparian areas, wetlands and the creeks in Coats Marsh East that replenish the "lake" during the winter.

I have a longer term concern, with respect to when the RDN reviews the Coats Marsh Management Plan (on the work plan for 2021).

I worry the RDN will go ahead and "downgrade" the Coats' "nature reserve status" in order to make it administratively similar to the adjoining 707 CP. All this with no objections from The Nature Trust of BC or GaLTT (Gabriola Land and Trails Trust), and no referrals that I am aware of to POSAC (I do recognize Coats is a Regional Park and POSAC deals with Community Parks; POSAC is still the best avenue for the RDN to receive 'Parks' input from Gabriola residents.)

I hope my concerns are misplaced, and the powers-that-be in addition to the LTC will be giving some consideration to the need of species other than humans on Gabriola for a modicum of undisturbed (non-urbanized) wildlife habitat.

~ Nick Doe