

To: Chief Administrative Officer
From: Chris Gruenwald, Director of Forestry
Subject: **2022 Stave West Review**

Date: October 17, 2022

Recommendation(s)

This report is provided for information only. Council action is not required.

This report provides a summary of the summer activities in the Stave West Forest and Recreation Area (SWFRA), including patrols, challenge areas, wildfire risk, new amenities, and future plans.

Purpose

1. To provide a summary of the summer activities in the Stave West Forest and Recreation Area, including information on:
 - a. Patrols and enforcement.
 - b. Problem areas in the SWFRA
 - c. Wildfire risk
 - d. New amenities and future plans

Background

2022 in the Stave West Forest and Recreation Area was noticeably quieter than the pandemic fueled busy seasons in 2021/2022. While the season was quieter, several common problems are still occurring, including:

1. Overcapacity at BC Hydro Rec Sites – Hayward Lake and Stave Boat Launch, causing significant parking and safety issues along the Florence Lake FSR
2. Unauthorized camping outside of designated campsites – garbage issues which attract wildlife and campfires are the main challenges with this activity
3. Wildfire issues, due to careless and reckless behaviour

Discussion and Analysis

Patrols and Enforcement

Over the last three years, the Stave West Forest and Recreation Area has utilized significant enforcement resources in the area, including:

- RCMP
- Conservation Officers Service
- Mission Fire Rescue Service
- By-Laws Department
- Forestry Department Fire Warden

The requirement for significant enforcement resources stemmed from overcapacity and misuse of the SWFRA, which resulted from COVID-19 travel restrictions. A summary of enforcement activities of the different agencies for 2022 is presented in the attachments.

Problem Areas within the SWFRA

There are two primary problem areas within and around the SWFRA:

1. BC Hydro Recreation Areas:

- a. **Hayward Lake Rec Site** – user totals provided by the Hayward contract staff show a total of 131,573 users from June to August (average per day = 1,430 users). Hot weekends were significantly above average – for example the weekend of July 23/24 averaged 7,500 people per day. This congestion results in significant parking, traffic, and safety issues in the area, both on Dewdney Trunk Road and the Florence Lake FSR
- b. **Hydro Boat Launch** – user totals provided show a total of 91,639 users from June to August (average per day = 996 users). The size of the Hydro Boat Launch area, including the launch and parking area, is not currently equipped to handle this capacity, and it results in significant traffic, parking, and safety issues

Staff have had numerous discussions and meetings with BC Hydro regarding the parking and congestion issues at their rec sites; some of the solutions being examined include:

- Implementing a 'Day Use' pass system for the Hayward recreation site; a trial of this system was set up at the Buntzen Lake rec site over the summer months this season, and we will be having further discussions with BC Hydro regarding how this system worked at this location. The Stave West Leadership Team would definitely favour implementation of this system at Hayward Lake, in order to reduce congestion
- Expansion of the Boat Launch Parking – BC Hydro had planned this pre-COVID, but it has since been delayed for budgetary reasons. Staff met with Hydro on April 12th to discuss parking lot expansion, including offering the Forestry operations crew to construct the parking lot. Hydro indicated support for this, but informed staff that this project would have to go through a rigorous departmental review, as well as First Nations consultation. The City has offered to work with the Nations on the referral process, through the SWFRA, but the Hydro internal review process remains a sticking point. This project will require significant political support to get started in a timely fashion.

2. **Unauthorized Camping:**

- a. Rec, Sites, and Trails BC has designated the following areas be designated as 'Day Use only':
 - i. Devils Lake
 - ii. North Kearsley Creek

These orders were established due to the increase in unauthorized camping in these areas, which has resulted in significant garbage and wildlife issues; bears have had to be destroyed in the SWFRA, as a result of these activities. The Conservation Officers Service has focussed significant efforts enforcing the Day Use order in these areas, including Orders to Vacate, and it has made a considerable difference in reducing both misuse and wildlife conflicts in the SWFRA.

Wildfire Risk

There were three Fires started within and around the SWFRA; all three were a result of careless behavior:

1. On July 31st - a Fire broke out near 10km on the Florence Lake FSR. The cause was a campfire in the woods, just off the FSR. Local recreation users immediately started a bucket patrol until Mission Fire Rescue Service arrived on scene to control the fire.
2. On August 2nd – the Tingle Creek Fire, a human caused fire, started in Clearwater Bay, which is 6km north of the MMF. The fire reached 4ha in size and was successfully controlled by BCWS
3. On September 10th – the Florence Lake Fire, located just north of the TFL boundary near Florence Lake, was started from an abandoned campfire. MFRS, BCWS, and MMF staff were all on hand to help control the Fire.
 - a. We sent one of our excavators onsite last week to help with control and cleanup efforts.
 - b. The fire, which reached 5ha in size, was brought under control in a timely fashion
 - c. It's important to acknowledge the efforts of BCWS for their prompt response and the significant resources they put onto this fire. On September 11th, they had three helicopters dropping water on the fire and had a unit crew onsite – despite resource pressures dealing with significant Wildfires in Hope and Manning Park

These incidents demonstrate that, while there are significant enforcement and patrol resources in the SWFRA, fires can still start as a result of careless behavior. The Department will be following up with enforcement agencies to review the season and develop some additional strategies for the 2023 season. One option would be the expansion of the Indigenous Guardians program, not only for the SWFRA, but for local First Nation Forest Tenures (Katzie-Kwantlen First Nation Woodlands Licence)

New Amenities and Future Plans

May 19th marked the official opening of two new trails in Stave West – 79 Grind and Devils Lake Loop. These trails have shown to be quite popular with the public. The Stave West Leadership Team, which includes local First Nation communities, are also finalizing the production and installation of interpretive signage for the Devils Lake Loop and will be hosting an official opening for the 1km interpretive section of the trail once completed.

New amenities currently planned for 2023 include:

1. Completion of a by-pass trail for Mt. Crickmer – this will replace the section of trail along the existing road with a forested trail that will start from the Rock Creek Campsite. We will also be examining the feasibility of completing a loop from the top of Mt. Crickmer to the Sayres Lake campsite
2. Expansion of the Kearsley Creek Campsite – the expansion would be to the north of the existing campsite; once completed, this will eliminate the unauthorized camping issues in the area.
3. Connection of the Rolley Lake Loop with Devils Lake Loop Trail – this provide a ‘double loop’ trail network around Rolley Lake and Devils Lake
4. Completion of a 4-wheel drive training centre at 11km gravel pit – working in partnership with the 4-wheel drive association of BC, this training facility will provide opportunities for proper off-road vehicle training

Summary and Conclusion

While the 2022 season in the SWFRA was quieter than the 2020/2021 seasons, several common issues remain, including:

1. Overcapacity at BC Hydro Rec Sites – Hayward Lake and Stave Boat Launch, causing significant parking and safety issues along the Florence Lake FSR. Council support will be required to ensure Hydro deals with these issues in a timely fashion.
2. Unauthorized camping outside of designated campsites – garbage issues which attract wildlife and campfires are the main challenges with this activity. Working with Rec, Sites and Trails BC, the department is planning an expansion of the Kearsley Creek campsite, which will allow for better management of camping in the area
3. Wildfire issues, due to careless and reckless behaviour – the department will be following up with enforcement agencies to identify additional measures that can be taken to reduce Wildfire risk in the area

2022 saw the official opening of two new trails in the SWFRA, with plans for additional trail networks to be constructed in 2023.

Report Prepared by: Chris Gruenwald, Director of Forestry
Reviewed by: Kelly Cameron, Forest Technologist
Approved for Inclusion: Mike Younie, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment(s)

Attachment A: Conservation Officers Service - 2022 Summary
Attachment B: BC Hydro Rec Sites – 2022 Summary
Attachment C: RCMP – 2022 Summary

Attachment D: By-Laws – 2022 Summary
Attachment E: Forestry Department Fire Warden – 2022 Summary