

# north shore news

## District mulls Fromme trail use

### Environmental audit flags creek crossings as concern

Maria Spitale-Leisk / North Shore News

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District of North Vancouver's parks department is currently reviewing the findings of an independent environmental assessment of trails on Mount Fromme. Photo supplied

A deviation of natural water flow patterns in the recreational area on Fromme Mountain is a chief environmental concern, according to a recent consultant's report.

The District of North Vancouver is also being advised to raise its standards for how staff will effectively manage all aspects of the trails, including environmental protection.

Diamond Head Consulting — an environmental planning and management firm — was hired by the district, at the request of council, to conduct an independent environmental assessment of trails on Fromme. The purpose of the environmental audit is to determine whether or not the district is on track with implementing environmental goals set out in the Fromme Mountain Trail Classification Study, approved by council in 2008.

A synopsis of Diamond Head's findings was presented to council at a committee-of-the-whole meeting Tuesday evening.

The biggest environmental concerns for Fromme are soil erosion, water flow, impacts on the creeks and the wetlands — and the ongoing

building of unauthorized trails, said Mike Coulthard, a senior forester and biologist with Diamond Head. "As soon as the water flow gets into those channels — it really erodes the (trail). And once they get eroded, it's very hard to bring them back," explained Coulthard.

His team assessed eight Fromme trails last summer, and mapped all the creeks in the area. "Most creek crossings didn't comply with the standards that were laid out in the document," said Coulthard, referring to the district's 2008 study.

Diamond Head referenced the best management practices determined by DNV staff and laid out in the trail classification document. "And one of the recommendations we made (is) to upgrade those standards," said Coulthard.

The eight trails examined represent a cross-section of the Mount Fromme recreation area — a haven for mountain bikers and hikers alike.

Coulthard's chief finding is the newer trails are well maintained to current environmental standards, while their older counterparts are worse for wear. The main concern is after a deluge of rain a torrent of water flows down the trails and into creeks, affecting water quality. Enhancing creek crossings and upgrading trails adjacent to creeks are priority recommendations to help mitigate the environmental impacts.

Since 2008, significant inroads have been made on Fromme: the removal of dangerous trees, replanting vegetation, rerouting eroded trails — and constructing new boardwalks and bridges along the Baden Powell Trail.

Official signs clarifying trail use and code of conduct have been installed in key areas on Fromme.

According to parks staff, an estimated 70 per cent of Fromme's sanctioned trails have seen improvements that were recommended back in 2008.

Maintenance of the mountain biking trails is mostly handled by volunteers, through a partnership between the district and the North Shore Mountain Bike Association.

In the past decade, the district has documented an increase in mountain bikers on Fromme. This has led to some conflicts involving area residents who are mainly concerned about the increase in traffic. The district is hoping to alleviate some of that pressure this summer when the Fromme Mountain parking and staging area is due to open.

The parks department is still working through the technical data Diamond collected, before presenting council with a final report. The process is still in the early stages, with public consultation still needed, before any major decisions for Fromme are made. However, council members did have a chance to weigh in on the preliminary report they were presented Tuesday.

"I'm going to recommend to council ... that we build on the experience that we just had with Panorama Drive in terms of (a) deliberative stakeholder session, and we apply that model to this discussion," said Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn.

Coun. Lisa Muri suggested funnelling some monies from the parks department budget into trail-related initiatives.

Meanwhile Coun. Mathew Bond, NSMBA past president, questioned the district's adaptivity.

"Do you feel like we have really been adaptive?" he asked staff. "It's been since 2008 that we had this original plan and, you know, we're back in 2015 with a follow-up to that."

Mayor Richard Walton said he is encouraged by the volunteer trail maintenance labour the district has been able to leverage, but balked at the idea of more parking lots near Fromme. "I have no interest in turning Fromme Mountain into Coney Island at all," said Walton.

The Fromme Mountain discussion is expected to come before council again on March 2.