

District of Saanich People, Pets & Parks

A District Wide Strategy for Sharing Saanich's Parks

Project Overview

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INTRODUCTION

The District of Saanich is developing the People, Pets and Parks Strategy to provide a framework to help manage the District's parks and open spaces and achieve positive relationships between people, pets and the environment.

WHY IS THE STRATEGY NEEDED?

- Saanich has more pets and people than ever before.
- Saanich has more people and pets per hectare of parkland than ever before, especially where compact development is happening.
- The population of people and pets is projected to continue increasing.
- There is concern about the cumulative impacts of people and pets on the environment.
- There is an increasing diversity of park users in Saanich parks and some people avoid using parks because of off-leash dogs.
- There are current best practices for managing pets in parks that can help reduce conflict and make the parks more welcoming to everyone.

PROJECT TIMELINE



HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?

Your input is essential! We need your help to create a strategy that reflects the community's needs and aspirations for park use. There are a variety of ways to participate online and in-person. Current opportunities are highlighted below.



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DEMOGRAPHICS

- In 2016, the District of Saanich had a population of 114,148 people, in 2021 the population increased to **117,735**, an increase of 3.1% or 3,587 people.
- Between 2019 and 2038, the population in Saanich is projected to grow at an annual growth rate of 0.5-0.6%, an increase of approximately 700-800 new residents each year to 2038.

How many dogs are in Saanich?

Agriculture Canada Estimates: **23,547 dogs**

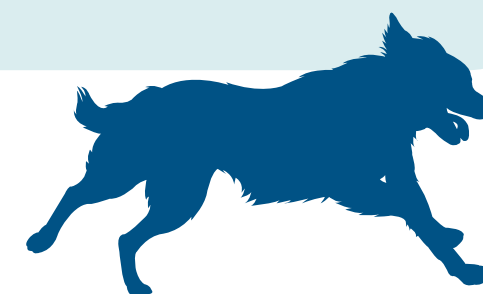
Statistically Valid Phone Survey Estimates: **15,740-22,315 dogs**

District of Saanich (2021): **8,510 licensed dogs**

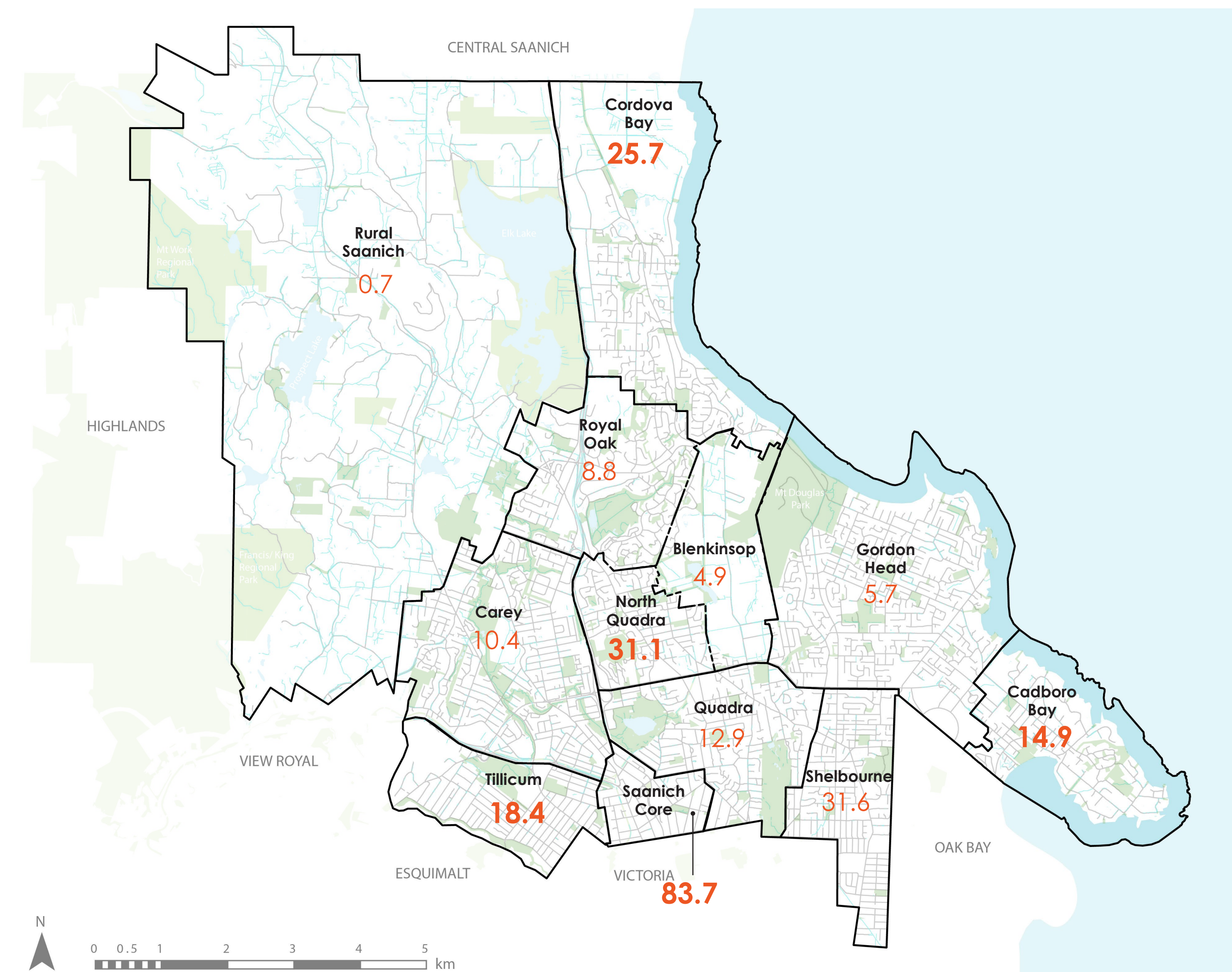
How many dogs are projected in Saanich?

There could be approximately **25,869 dogs** in Saanich if the population reaches 129,348 residents in 2038, approximately 2,322 additional dogs.

Saanich could have approximately **9,349 licensed dogs** in 2038 (if the current number of licensed dogs per resident is maintained).



LICENSED DOGS PER HECTARE OF PARK SPACE



- The local areas with the highest density of dogs per hectare of parks space include Saanich Core, Shelbourne, and North Quadra.
- The local areas with the lowest density of dogs per hectare of parks space include Rural Saanich, Blenkinsop, and Gordon Head.
- This information helps to determine which areas in Saanich have the highest number of dogs in relation to the amount of park space available, and where there could be higher demand for park space.



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EXISTING BYLAWS

- Dog waste must be picked up and removed immediately (unless on the owner's property).
- Dogs are not permitted to "run at large" or be on any public place unless the dog is accompanied and "under effective control" of a competent person or is confined by a leash or chain.

Saanich's **Park Petiquette Brochure** describes being "under effective control" as: **"within sight and will immediately return to you when called."**

The Capital Regional District defines "under control" as: **having a clear sightline to the dog and the dog immediately returns to the owner when called or signalled.**

Within the context of Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations, **Canadian Wildlife Services** has described "continuous and effective control" as: **restrained by a leash, in a transport carriage or cage, attached to a static object, held tightly by the animal's collar, held tightly in the owners arms.**

Saanich Police Department Briefing Note (2021)

- Dogs are currently permitted off-leash on most trails and parks in Saanich. Only a few parks and trails have dog restrictions.

Seasonal Restrictions

- 1 park has seasonal restrictions for the entire park (May-August):
 - » Whitehead Park
- 8 parks in Saanich have fenced baseball / softball fields. Saanich's Animals Bylaw prohibits dogs from being in a fenced baseball field (March to October).
- 2 beaches have seasonal restrictions (May-August):
 - » PKOLS Mount Douglas beach
 - » Cordova Bay Beach

On-leash Requirements

- 1 park has on-leash requirements for the whole park:
 - » Cadboro-Gyro Park
- 1 park has on-leash requirements for certain areas of the park:
 - » Blenkinsop Lake Park
- 55 parks in Saanich have playgrounds or spray pads (about 32% of parks). Saanich's Animals Bylaw requires all dogs to be on a leash within a 10 metre (32.8 feet) radius of any playground equipment in a District Park.
- In addition, Saanich's Animals Bylaw prohibits dogs from being off-leash on a highway, school ground, college ground, or at the Royal Oak Burial Park.

Restrictions

- 2 parks prohibit dogs from certain areas of the park in addition to having on-leash requirements:
 - » Rithet's Bog Park
 - » Cedar Hill Park
- 5 parks in Saanich have an artificial soccer field (about 3% of parks). Saanich's Animals Bylaw prohibits dogs from being on an artificial turf field in any park.
- **No Dogs Allowed**
 - 2 parks prohibit dogs from the entire park:
 - » Quicks Bottom Park
 - » Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

There are 171 regional parks in Saanich, and 60 of these parks have some kind of restriction on dogs (about 35% of parks).

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BYLAWS IN NEIGHBOURING JURISDICTIONS

- Greater Victoria is comprised of 13 jurisdictions including the District of Saanich. Each municipality has individual bylaws and regulations related to pets in parks.
- Restrictions for dogs in parks can be categorized in the following way:



- On-leash requirements for dogs.
- Dogs only permitted off-leash in designated off-leash areas.



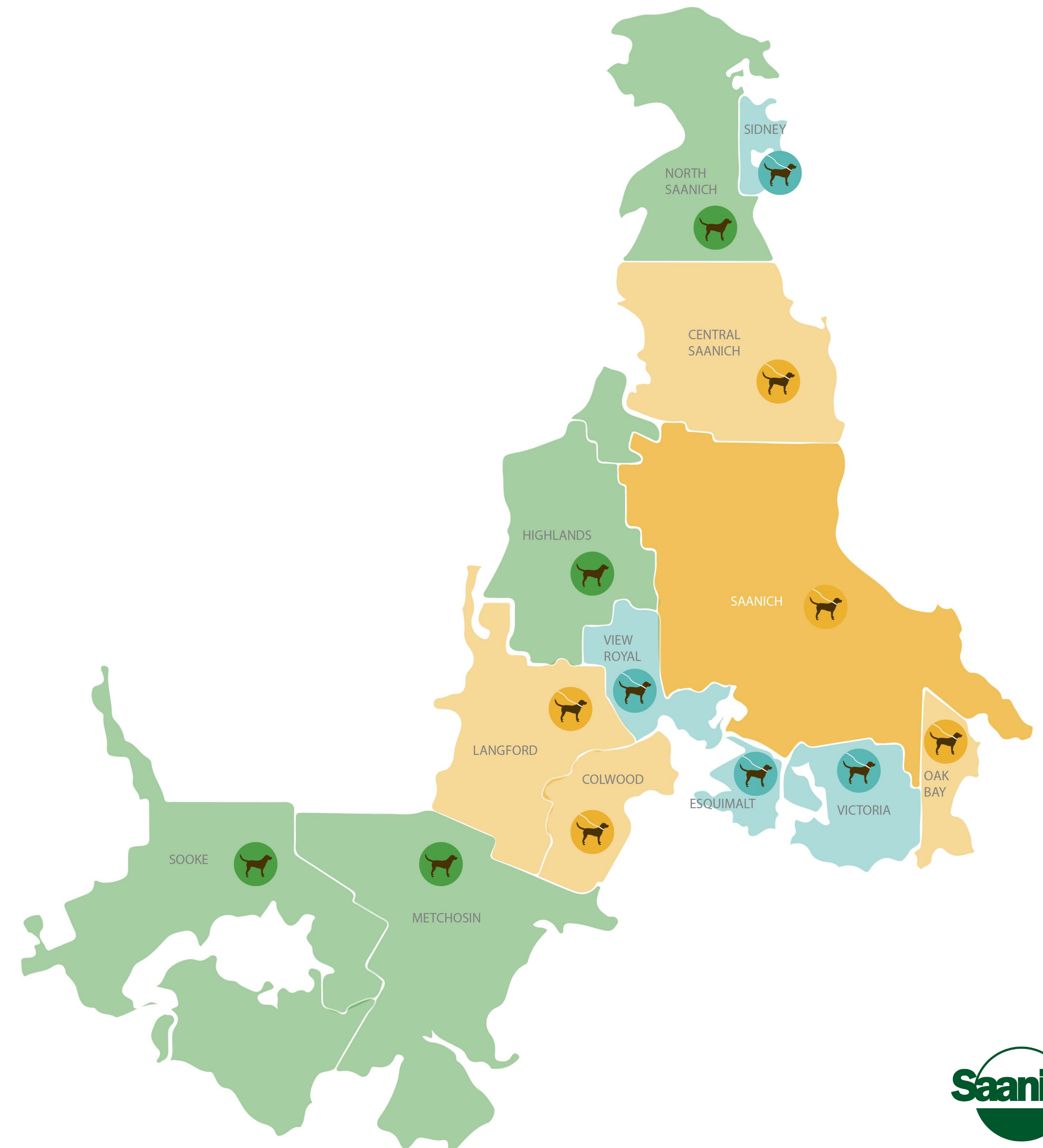
- No on-leash requirements for dogs, except in specific areas, and during varying time periods.



- No on-leash requirements (except for vicious dogs), or any areas where dogs are not permitted to be off-leash.

Did you know?

Capital Regional District Animal Care enforces the Animals Bylaws in the District of Saanich.



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What We've Heard So Far

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Statistically Valid / Representative Phone Survey:

Community members participated in a statistically valid phone survey which gathered input about existing park use, community priorities, and the challenges and benefits of shared use of parks by people and pets in Saanich.

Online Survey:

Community members completed an online survey that gathered input on current use of Saanich parks, and successes and challenges with the current park system related to pets, parks and users.

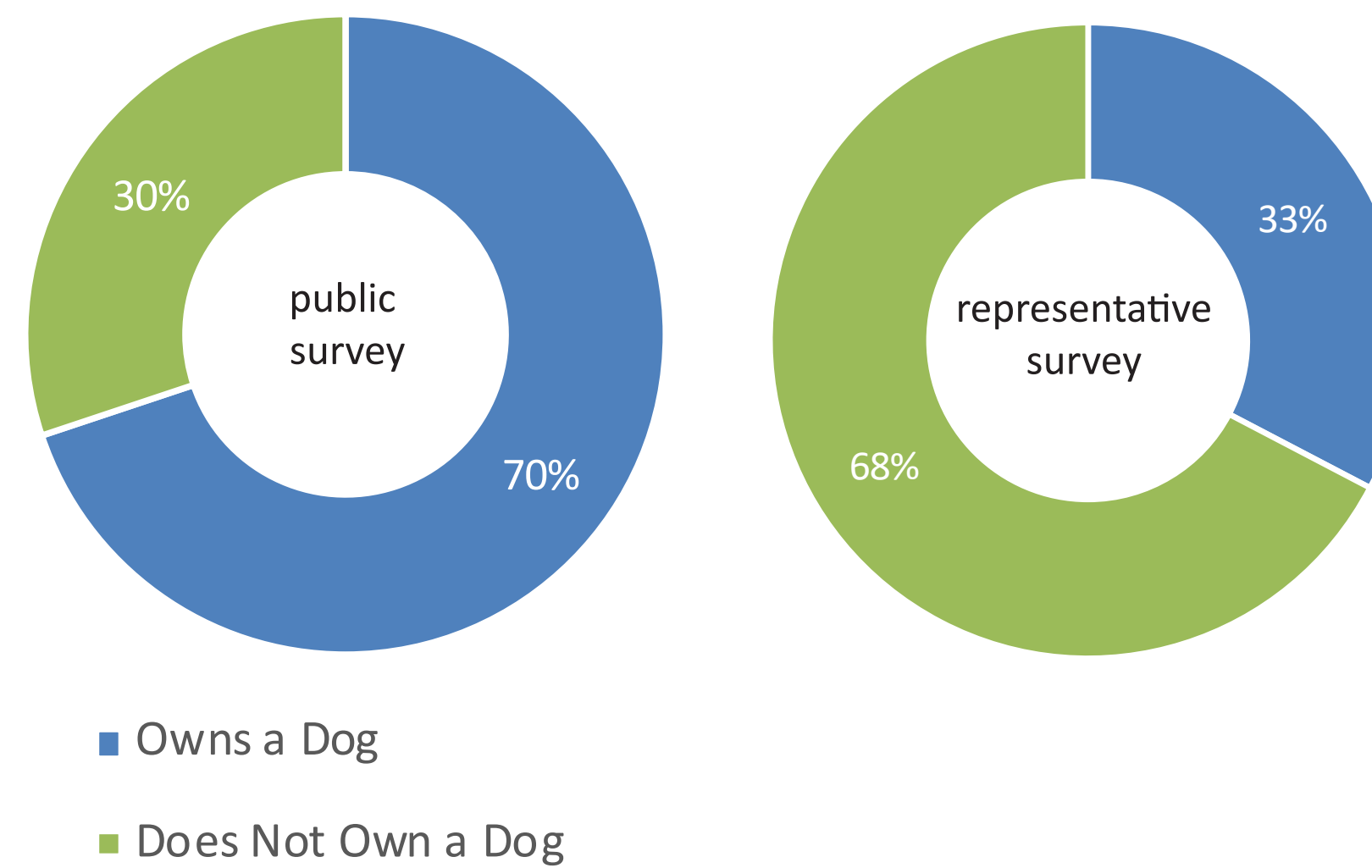
Community Conversations and Kitchen Table Workbooks:

Community members attended two online workshops to better understand and meaningfully engage with key issues and opportunities identified during background review. Workbooks were provided to those unable to attend a workshop or preferred to facilitate their own group conversation.

Online Stakeholder Workshops:

Various stakeholders, including representatives from dog owner interest and advocacy groups, intergovernmental agencies and, environmental and stewardship groups attended online workshops to share their specific interests and expertise.

DOG OWNERSHIP



HOW CAN WE BEST SHARE SAANICH PARKS?

Protection of natural areas and sensitive ecosystems

41% selected this in the public survey and 43% in the representative survey

Safety for people

36% selected this in the public survey and 77% in the representative survey

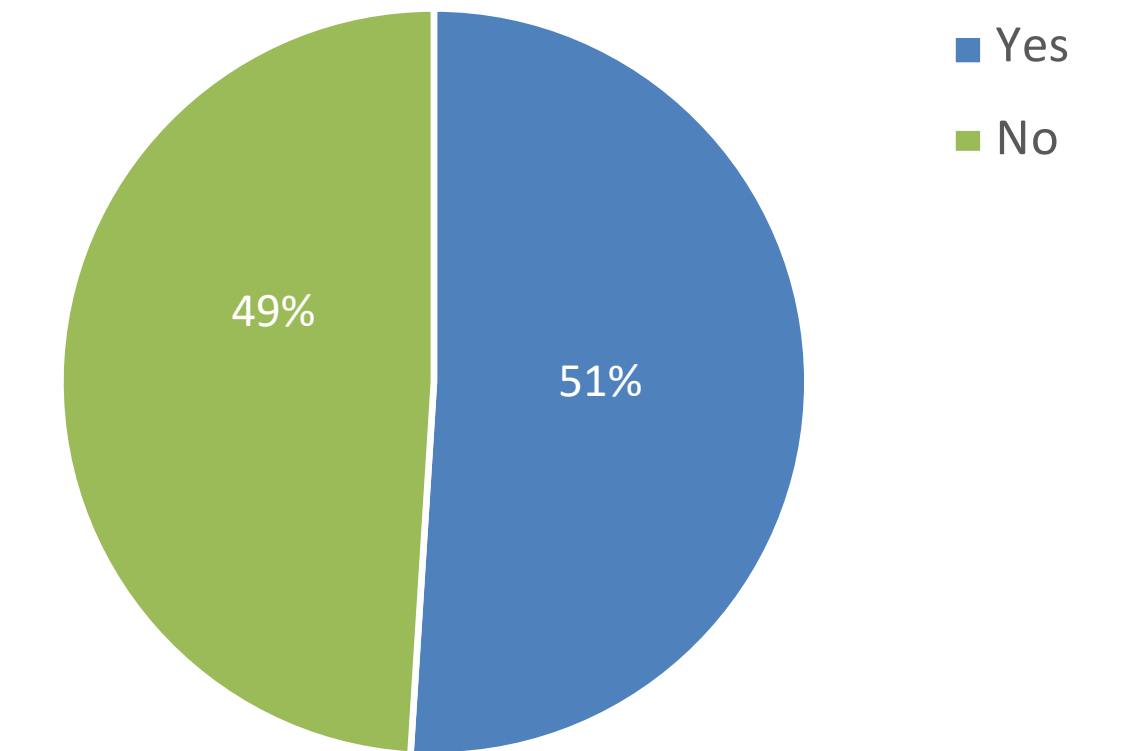
Safety for dogs/pets

40% selected this in the public survey and 38% in the representative survey

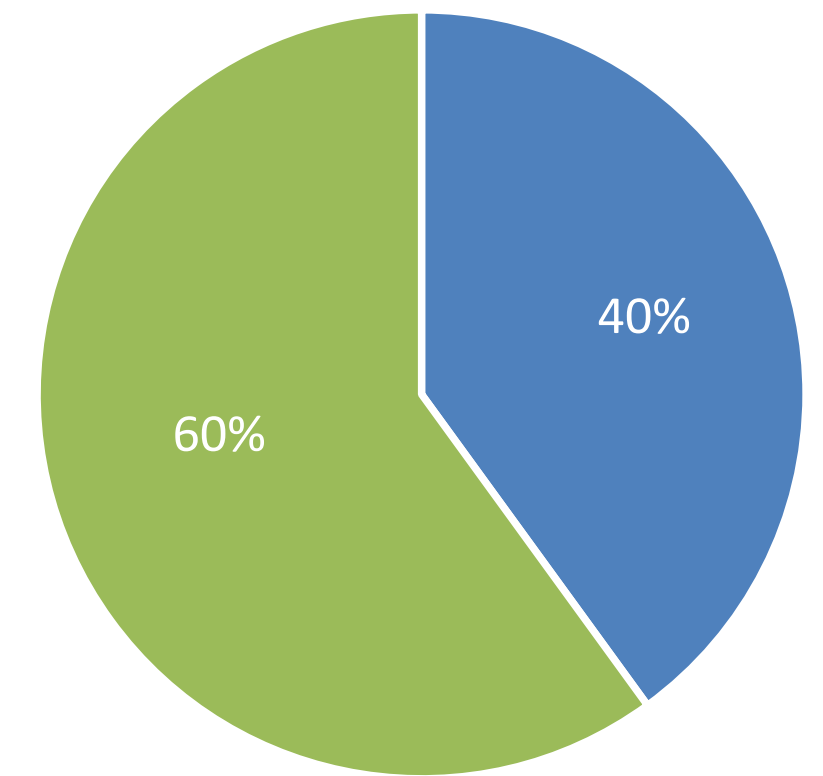
Location and distribution of off-leash areas for dogs

35% selected this in the public survey and 40% in the representative survey

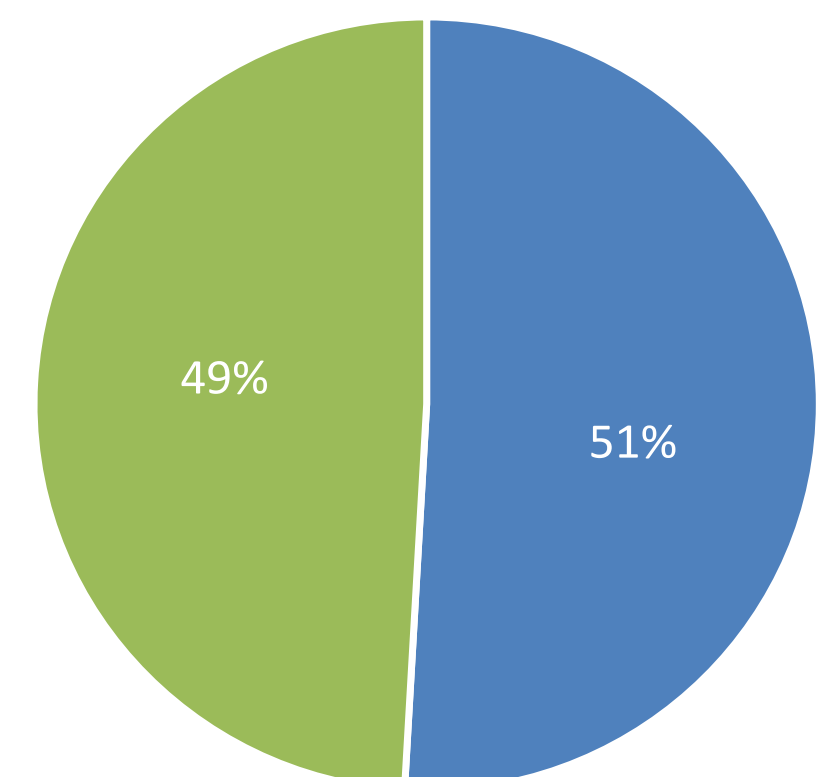
Have you ever had a negative experience or conflict with an off-leash dog? (representative survey)



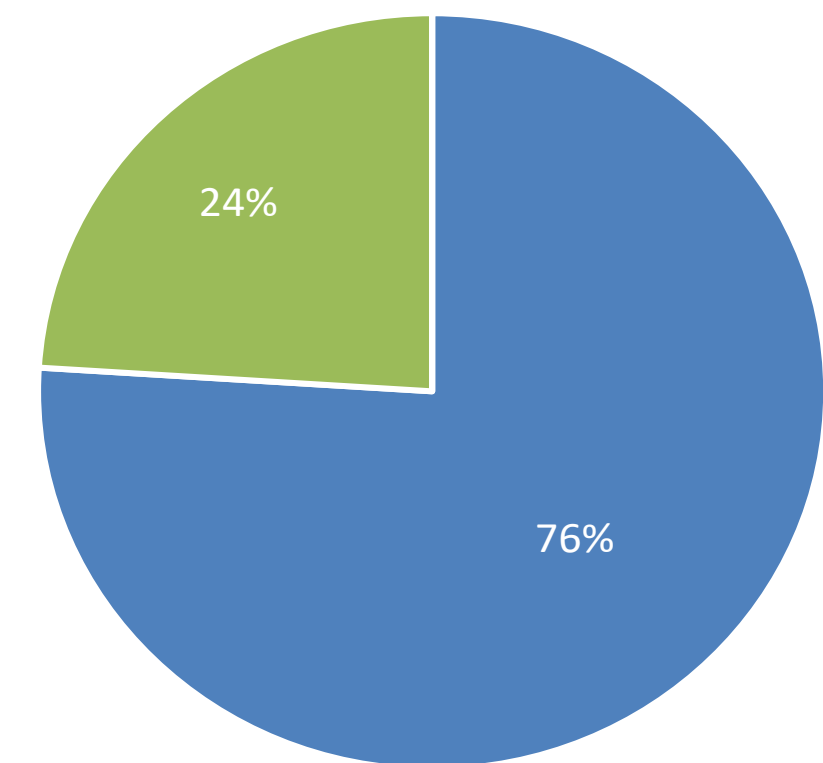
Are there parks you avoid because of the high number of off-leash dogs? (public survey)



Public survey participants were almost equally divided on whether they would support having a park where no dogs were allowed.



The majority (76%) of representative survey respondents agreed that specific areas where dogs are not allowed offleash will help reduce conflicts.



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WHAT ARE THE COMMUNITY'S VALUES?



Open Space

- All park visitors recognize the value of having open space for dogs to play and get exercise off-leash in parks.
- Some indicated that the value of play cannot be replicated while on-leash, and the positive effects on physical and mental health for both dogs and their owners was the number one benefit.



Variety of Parks

- The community values having access to a variety of different types of parks that are distributed throughout the District.
- There are also community members who would like to enjoy different types of parks without dogs being present.



Safety

- All park visitors agree that safety is an important consideration when it comes to people and pets sharing Saanich parks.



Environmental Considerations

- The community values environmental and wildlife protection, as well as having opportunities to connect with and recreate in nature.



Park Cleanliness and Waste Management

- The community values park cleanliness, and waste management is an important consideration for people and pets sharing Saanich's parks.



Sense of Community

- The community values the personal connections that can be formed by bringing pets to parks, and by interacting with other community members.



Park Equity

- There was agreement that parks should be spaces for all to enjoy, and consideration should be given to the enjoyment and safety of all park users.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?



Dog Behavior and Lack of Training/Control

- The top challenge related to pets in parks was owners not having control over their off-leash dogs.



Environmental Considerations

- All park users highlighted the importance of environmental and wildlife protection.
- Park users expressed concerns with off-leash dogs disturbing and chasing wildlife, and impacting natural and re-naturalized areas in Saanich parks.



Communication and Education

- The community indicated that bylaws and restrictions are confusing and not well understood. There is also a lack of awareness of etiquette related to people and pets in parks.



Increasing Demand

- More people and pets are putting pressure on the parks system and there are unmet needs for places to safely exercise and socialize pets, particularly in high density areas.



Visitor Comfort

- Some community members avoid parks in Saanich due to off-leash dogs being present.

Opportunities to connect with nature

62% selected this in the public survey and 35% in the representative survey

Cleanliness of parks and facilities

36% selected this in the public survey and 43% in the representative survey

Environmental protection and wildlife habitat

41% selected this in the public survey and 52% in the representative survey

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Pets and the Environment

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Community engagement determined that the environment should be a key consideration in the development of the Strategy.

Below are the highlights of the background research.

Did you know?

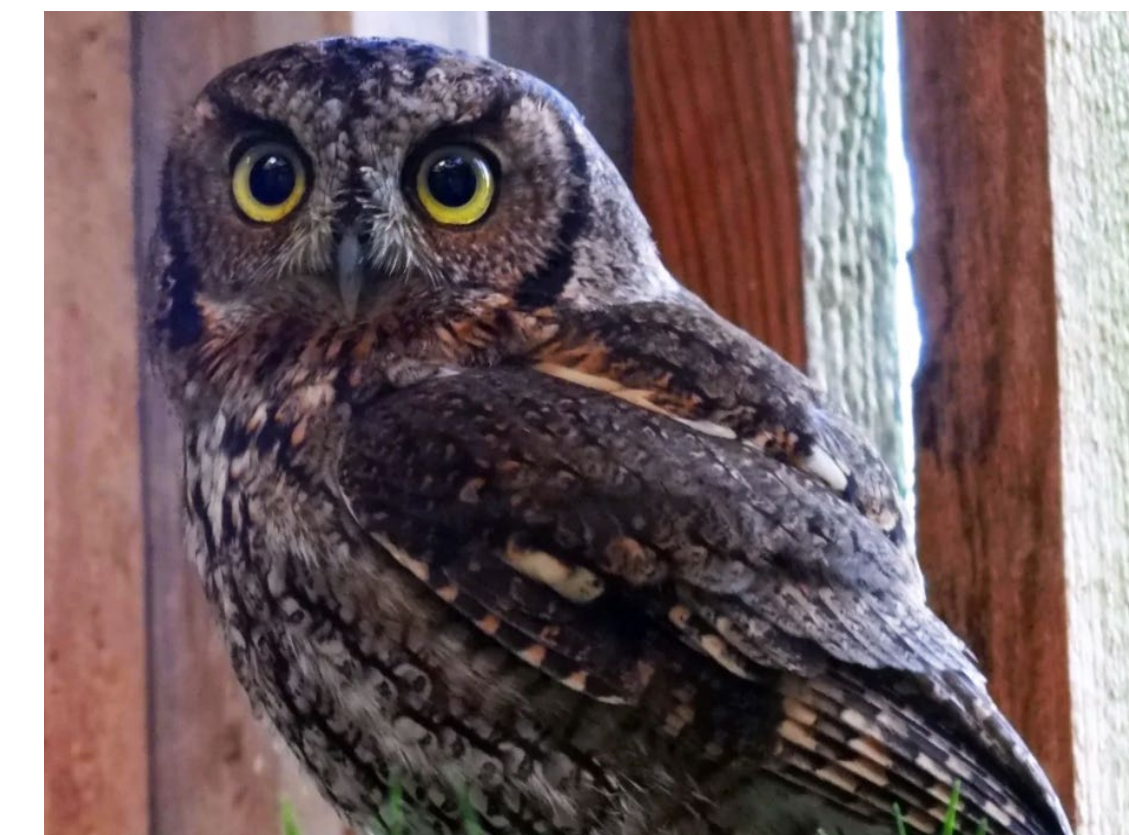
- There are many ecologically sensitive areas in Saanich, including riparian areas, wetlands, estuaries and mudflats that provide significant habitat for wildlife and birds. These areas also reduce the risk of erosion, and naturally capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Saanich is home to 184 species at risk and rare ecosystems, including Garry Oak, and Coastal Douglas-fir Forest ecosystems.
- Pets can impact natural ecosystems by causing soil compaction, erosion on slopes, damage to vegetation, spreading of invasive plants, and disturbing wildlife, birds and species at risk.
- Dog waste is a source of E. coli bacteria in the environment, and humans, wildlife and other dogs can catch parasites and diseases from dog waste. This is one reason why dogs are often excluded from swimming areas.
- Disturbances increase alertness and stress response in wildlife, and birds which can mean that wildlife spend less time feeding, breeding, sleeping, and caring for young. Disturbances to foraging and nesting birds results in lost time foraging and an increase in time spent away from nests, and may lead to declines in population.
- In a study on wildlife and dog disturbance in Boundary Bay Regional Park (near Tsawwassen), dogs disturbed wildlife 15% of the time overall. 25% of off-leash dogs disturbed wildlife, and 2% of on-leash dogs disturbed wildlife.
- Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary (MBS) is located in urban Greater Victoria, near the southern tip of Vancouver Island. It is home to approximately 270 bird species, and the site supports over 75 species of animals and plants of federal and provincial conservation concern. Low numbers of birds, for various reasons, remain a concern today.



Colquitz River Mudflats/Estuary



Riparian Restoration



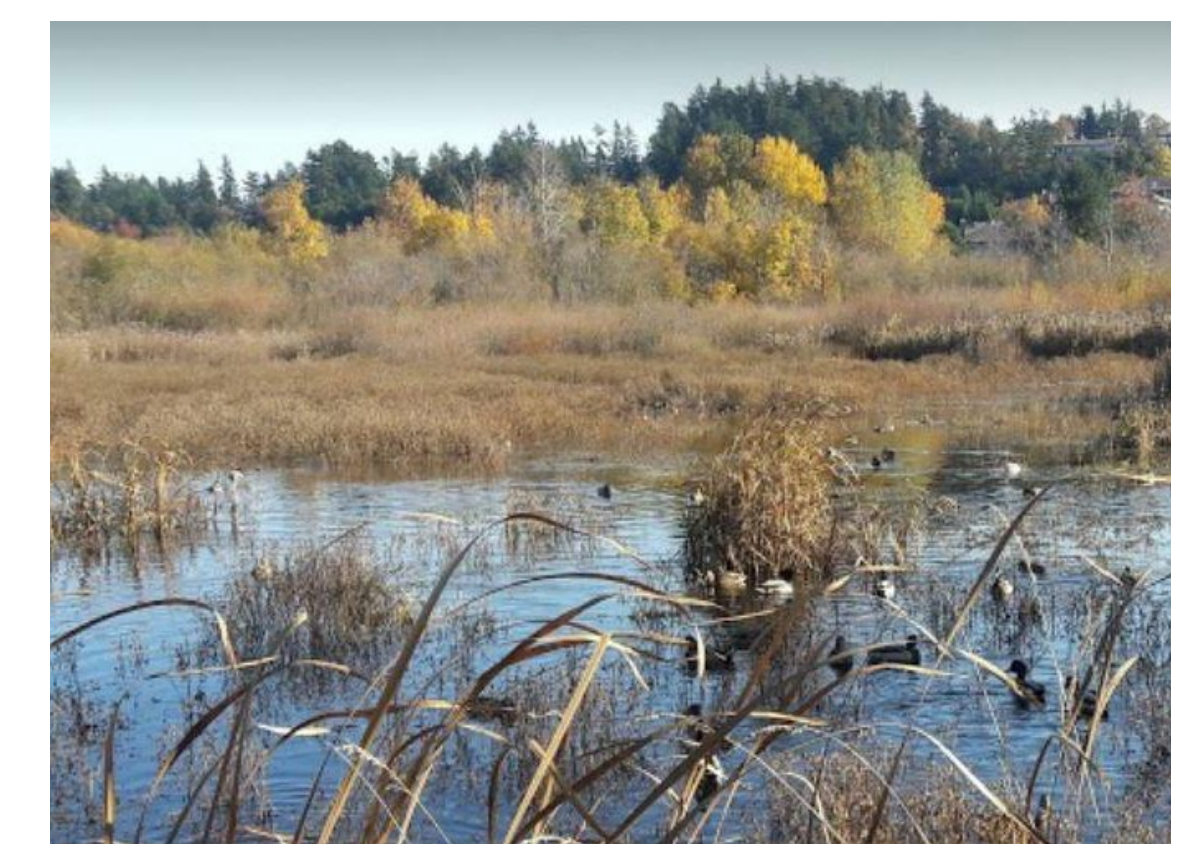
Western Screech Owl



Douglas Fir Forest



Garry Oak Meadow



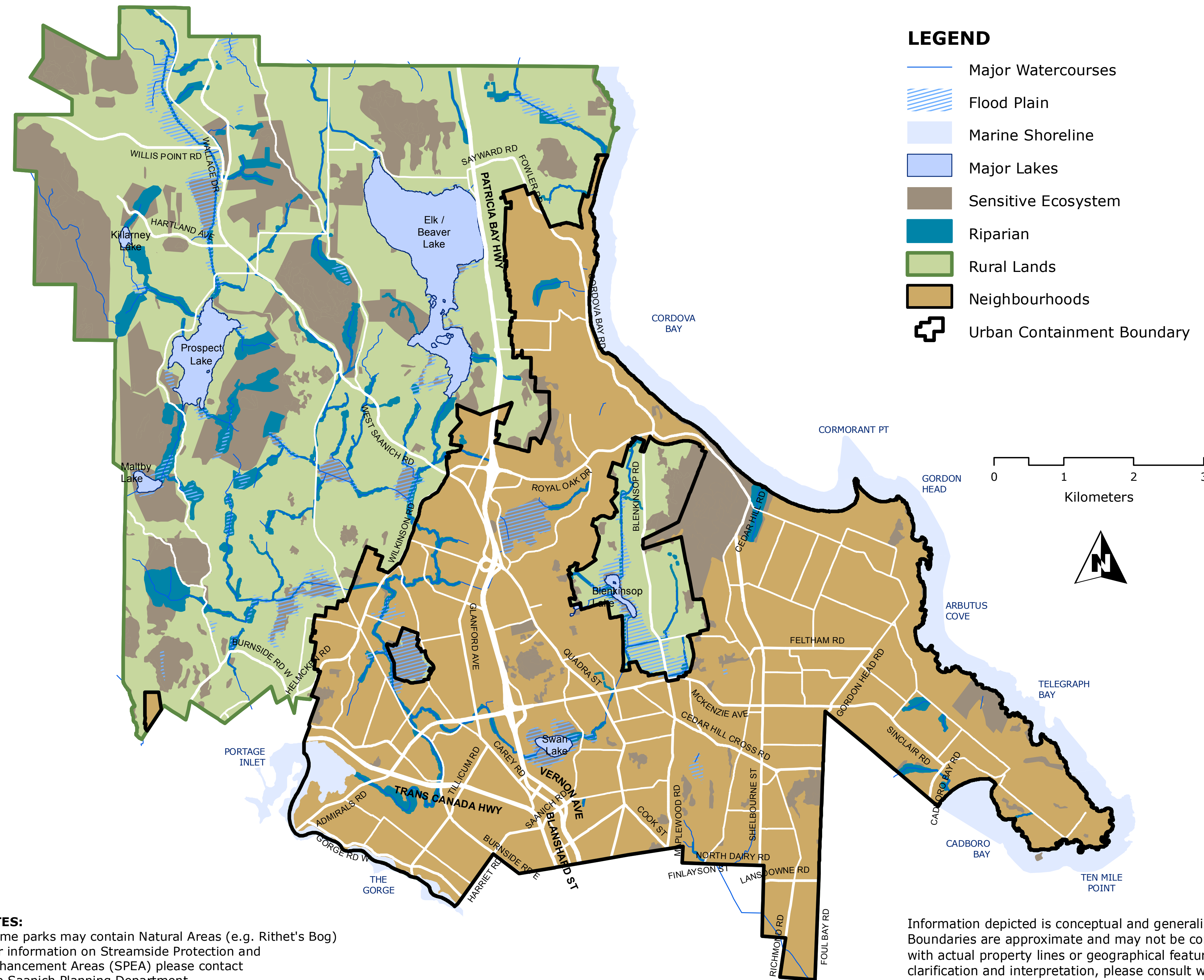
Rithet's Bog

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Sensitive Ecosystem and Riparian Areas

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Scan this QR code for more information on environmental planning and environmentally significant areas in Saanich:



Scan this QR code for more information on Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems:



- NOTES:**
- Some parks may contain Natural Areas (e.g. Rithet's Bog)
 - For information on Streamside Protection and Enhancement Areas (SPEA) please contact the Saanich Planning Department

Information depicted is conceptual and generalized. Boundaries are approximate and may not be consistent with actual property lines or geographical features. For clarification and interpretation, please consult with the Saanich Planning Department.



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Draft Vision, Guiding Principles and Goals

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DRAFT VISION

Saanich parks are safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all park users and provide a variety of experiences that balance the different needs of people and pets while protecting environmental integrity.

DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1** *Parks are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for everyone, including people with and without pets.*
- 2** *The importance of parks is essential to pets and to their guardians' health and well-being.*
- 3** *Appropriately designed and located pet amenities protect environmental integrity and encourages stewardship.*
- 4** *We all contribute to and have a shared responsibility for creating welcoming and inclusive parks for all.*

DRAFT GOALS

- 1** *Ensure the rules, regulations and bylaws are clear and easily understood.*
- 2** *Improve compliance and pet licensing.*
- 3** *Improve protection of important and sensitive environmental areas.*
- 4** *Create a diversity of opportunities in parks for people with pets.*
- 5** *Ensure there are adequate places in parks for people who don't want to encounter dogs or other pets.*

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Options for Consideration

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1 Current Existing Saanich Model (with minor investment in pet-specific amenities)

Enhancements:



Increased communication, signage, and enforcement is prioritized.



Some dog exercise areas and amenities are created in high demand areas only.

Restrictions:



Default is that dogs are allowed off-leash when under effective control in most parks.



Approximately 70% of Saanich parks have no restrictions and 30% have some restrictions in some portions of the park.



Dogs are required to be on-leash or not allowed in some areas for environmental protection, and public health, and safety reasons as per existing rules.

The Up-Side

- Currently, dog owners have the opportunity to run/walk their dog off-leash in most parks with few exceptions.
- There is a large variety of parks where dogs can be off-leash including beaches, trails and natural areas.
- Least amount of investment by the District into pet-friendly amenities.

The Drawbacks

- Existing conflicts between off-leash dogs and other park users will not be mitigated under this model.
- Environmental protection is not prioritized.
- Doesn't adequately meet the needs of those with and without dogs who do not want to encounter dogs off-leash.
- Not proactive, given the recent and anticipated increase in population of people and dogs.

2 Modified Select Additional Restrictions and Enhancements

Enhancements:



Increased communication, signage, and enforcement is prioritized.



Dogs are required to be on-leash in parks and trails with high value natural areas such as Garry Oak Meadows, wetlands, and beaches.



Leash-optional opportunities, dog exercise areas, trails and amenities are created in each neighbourhood.



There should be at least one park per neighbourhood that doesn't allow dogs.

Restrictions:



Default is that dogs are allowed off-leash when under effective control in most parks.



Approximately 50% of Saanich parks have no restrictions and 50% have some restrictions in some portions of the park.

The Up-Side

- Park equity is increased by providing additional parks for those who would prefer not to have off-leash dogs around.
- The number of conflicts between off-leash dogs and other park users may be reduced in high-conflict areas.
- Increased protection for wildlife and natural areas, while allowing dogs on-leash on most trails and natural areas.
- More restrictions will be balanced by minor investment by the District into amenities for pets and their owners.

The Drawbacks

- Due to additional restrictions, dog owners may have to travel further to access a park that allows off-leash use. A variety of off-leash areas will remain (trails, dog exercise areas, fenced/unfenced areas), but there may be fewer options.
- Additional restrictions could include on-leash requirements in high value natural areas.
- Complexity of rules makes communication and enforcement more challenging.

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Options for Consideration

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3

Urban Context

Based on Victoria and Vancouver Models

Enhancements:



Increased communication, signage, and enforcement is prioritized.



Leash-optional opportunities, dog exercise areas, trails and amenities are created in each neighbourhood.



There should be at least one park per neighbourhood that doesn't allow dogs.

Restrictions:



Default is that dogs are required to be on-leash except in designated areas or on designated trails.



Approximately 30% of Saanich parks have no restrictions and 70% have some restrictions in some portions of the park.

The Up-Side

- Improved safety and comfort of non-dog owners through fewer interactions with off-leash dogs.
- Reduced impact on wildlife and the environment.
- Better protection for all wildlife and natural areas.
- Clear restrictions are easy to understand, communicate and enforce.

The Drawbacks

- Due to additional restrictions, dog owners may have to travel further to access a park that allows off-leash use. A variety of off-leash areas will remain (trails, dog exercise areas, fenced/unfenced areas), but there may be fewer options.
- High investment by the District into amenities for dogs and their owners.

4

Restrictive Based on Seattle Model

Enhancements:



Increased communication, signage, and enforcement is prioritized.



Off-leash areas must have a community stewardship group committed to management and maintenance.

Restrictions:



Default is that dogs are required to be on-leash except in designated, enclosed off-leash areas.



Approximately 15% of Saanich parks have no restrictions and 85% have some restrictions in some portions of the park.



Dogs are not allowed on beaches except in designated areas.

The Up-Side

- Improved safety and comfort of non-dog owners through fewer interactions with off-leash dogs.
- Better protection for all wildlife and natural areas.
- Clear restrictions are easy to understand, communicate and enforce.
- Potentially fewer beach closures caused by high levels E-coli caused by dog waste.
- Volunteer stewardship opportunities

The Drawbacks

- Dog owners may have to travel further to access an off-leash area.
- Doesn't meet the needs of dog owners who prefer open (not fenced) areas.
- Dogs are restricted from all beaches unless designated.
- Having a higher concentration of dogs in off-leash areas could result in more conflicts between dogs. However proper design, and management could reduce these risks.
- Greater investment by the District into amenities for dogs and their owners.

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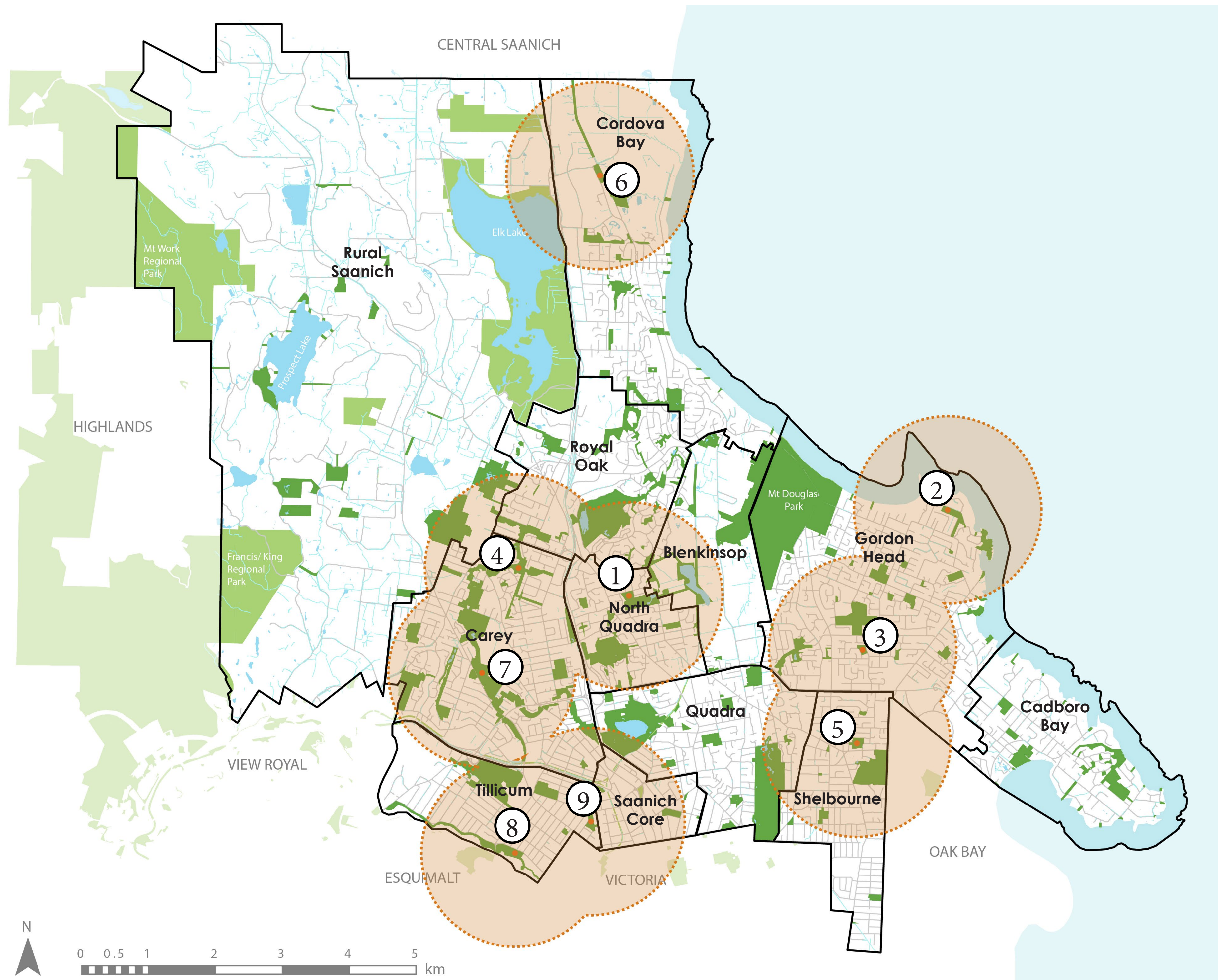
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Pop-Up Dog Parks

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2022 POP-UP DOG PARK LOCATIONS



The orange circles represent a 15 minute walking radius.

The Summer Pop-Up Dog Park Pilot Project provided fenced-in, off-leash areas in 9 different parks during the summer of 2022.

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| ① Beckwith Park | ④ Copley East Park | ⑦ Hyacinth Park |
| ② Vantreight Park | ⑤ Horner Park | ⑧ Gorge Park |
| ③ Blair Park | ⑥ Fowler Park | ⑨ Rudd Park |

2022 SELECTION CRITERIA

- The park is not zoned P-4N (Natural Park) or P-5 (Conservation).
- The site is an open field, not presently utilized for organized sport or in a natural park, and at least 0.14ha. This minimum size was determined by public feedback during the 2021 pilot project.
- On-site or street parking is available and is unlikely to impact residents.
- The park is not part of Saanich's Summer Neighbourhood Playground program.
- The physical terrain is flat and not sloping.
- The park is not likely to disrupt neighbours within the vicinity.



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Reflection

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What is your biggest hope for Saanich parks in the future?

