

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND REPORT

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE

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The Resort Municipality of Whistler | January 2011

THE PREMIER MOUNTAIN RESORT COMMUNITY  
MOVING TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



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## POLICY CONTEXT

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### Whistler 2020

Whistler residents continue to understand the importance of the natural environment to the success of the resort and the health of current and future generations. Visitors adopt the stewardship ethic held by residents as they see it integrated into everything around them.

A sustainable ecosystem management approach has been adopted to minimize Whistler's physical degradation of natural areas, and where possible, to restore and ultimately maintain ecological integrity and biodiversity.

An ecologically viable network of critical areas and wildlife habitat with connecting corridors is protected and remains healthy, along with exceptional scenic and recreation areas. Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping in Whistler has identified critical areas for protection and further study, and the Protected Areas Network protects these areas as part of a comprehensive regulatory framework.

The municipal boundaries were expanded to include the Whistler Interpretive Forest and other areas, enabling protection of the surrounding environment to the north and south. Resource, recreation and scenic interests in the backcountry are effectively coordinated through planning processes such as the provincial Land and Resource Management Plan and the Cheakamus Community Forest manages forest harvesting while protecting ecological viability, viewsheds, watersheds, and contributing to the local community through sustainable economic activity. Ongoing studies and monitoring of biodiversity, habitat, suitability, ecological health and user impacts have provided the necessary information and framework for effective environmental stewardship.

Natural features within recreation areas are retained and restored as much as possible, providing important connections between natural areas for wildlife. Native vegetation remains in Whistler's developed and recreation areas, helping to support wildlife suited to these areas while minimizing water use and the need for chemical pest management.

Education programs promote a stewardship ethic among users of Whistler's natural areas and include instructions for the proper design and use of trails and recreation areas, interpretive signs regarding critical areas, wildlife and habitat and naturescaping information.

Whistler's land use goals are complemented by the integration of sustainable technologies and best practices into all infrastructure and systems that support the resort community. Whistler's water provision and discharge practices and infrastructure emulate natural systems, not drawing more water than nature is able to provide. Volumes of effluent discharged into the Cheakamus River are lower than they were in the past and the wastewater is clean and readily assimilated without disturbing aquatic habitat or downstream water uses.

The resort community is committed to its zero waste goal, which was launched in the same year the landfill was closed to provide new resident housing. Visitors and new residents find it easy to recycle, aided by positive communication, education and convenient facilities.

Most notice that this is simply, the Whistler Way – for instance, few people buy products without reading the ingredient list first. Whistler continues to be a leader in the materials and solid waste management with progressive pricing structure, educational programs, regulation and other programs such as comprehensive purchasing policies and the Environmental Legacy Fund that directs revenues to support local environmental initiatives.

Visitors enjoy learning about the simple and effective methods used to capture and reuse rainwater while residents employ the methods in home building. The Whistler Green standard is applied to new homes and older structures have been retrofitted to meet Whistler sustainability objectives.

## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

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### Vision

Standards of environmental quality in Whistler exceed those in typical communities. The resort is set within a beautiful natural environment with clean air, clean water, extraordinary scenery, and the sense of being close to nature.

Whistler's natural environment is one of the community's greatest amenities and residents and visitors continue to understand the importance of the natural environment to the success of the resort. As a result, community members and visitors act as stewards of the natural environment. An ecologically functioning and viable network of critical natural areas is protected and where possible restored while use of critical natural areas is avoided and use of surrounding areas is limited to ensure ecosystem integrity. Indigenous biodiversity is maintained and the protected natural areas of the corridor include a full spectrum of locally representative ecosystems.

Continual learning about natural areas and species informs appropriate restoration and protection efforts.

Backcountry areas are protected from overuse and degradation. Developed and recreation areas are designed and managed to protect as much of the natural environment within and around them as possible.

In 2020, Whistler protects and, where possible, restores ecosystem integrity and biodiversity in all critical natural areas, and also protects and restores natural features within Whistler's developed and recreational areas. By this time:

1. An ecologically functioning and viable network of natural areas is protected and, restored where gaps occur.
2. Degradation of critical natural areas is avoided.
3. Indigenous biodiversity is maintained.
4. The protected natural areas throughout the Corridor include a full spectrum of locally representative ecosystems.
5. Backcountry areas are protected from overuse and degradation.
6. Community members and visitors are educated about the natural environment and act as stewards.
7. Continual learning about natural areas and species informs appropriate restoration and protection efforts.
8. Corridor partners adopt Natural Areas Strategies consistent with the intent of this document.

9. Natural systems guide management approaches.
10. Strategies for restoring degraded ecosystems are identified and implemented.
11. The existence of invasive species in Whistler is eliminated and prevented.

### Current Realities

Once a sleepy town 110 kilometres north of Vancouver, Whistler has transformed nearly overnight into one of the top ski resort destinations in North America. In the mid-1970s, plans to concentrate commercial development in Whistler Village, along with plans to collect and treat wastewater, led to the incorporation of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW). At that time, establishing a limit, or “bed unit cap” (the number of people staying in Whistler) ensured that current infrastructure—particularly water and sewage treatment—met the demand. Whistler is approaching that bed unit cap.

A significant consideration for Whistler is avoiding and mitigating the potential impacts of future larger scale developments on undeveloped properties where ecosystems and connectivity corridors remain largely intact and have not been fragmented by development.

The RMOW is committed to leading our community’s transition to a healthier built environment and to that end has developed “Whistler Green” – a comprehensive set of guidelines and resources for residential construction.

### Current Policies and Principles

1. The municipality endeavors to ensure that all policies related to land use, transportation, servicing and other aspects of community development are consistent with the goal of protecting environmental quality through such mechanisms as the development of alternative neighbourhood design guidelines and low impact development methods.
2. Preserving the quality of views will be given high priority in land use and development planning. The municipality will seek the fullest possible cooperation of provincial government agencies, such as the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forests and B.C. Hydro, whose activities and jurisdictions can affect the visual environment. The municipality will continue to work with the Ministry of Forests through its Forest and Wildland Advisory Committee and the Cheakamus Community Forest, to protect the scenic influences zones identified in the Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the forestry areas in Whistler and incorporated into the provincial Land and Resource Management Plan and Cheakamus Community Forest management plans. The municipality will also continue to work to protect other visually sensitive areas in the region, particularly the highway approaches and entrances to the Municipality, recognizing that the visitor’s resort experience begins upon leaving Greater Vancouver.
3. Development on the mountainsides surrounding Whistler will continue to be treated with utmost care. Mountainside development involves physical conditions that are difficult, and in addition to environmental concerns, also poses the risk of significant change in the visual environment and the character of the resort. Developments should not be approved on upper mountain side unless it can be demonstrated that no significant environmental or visual impacts would result from the development or from access roads built to serve the development.
5. The municipality has commissioned detailed environmental studies that have substantially upgraded the knowledge of areas which have significant development constraints and significant environmental sensitivity.
6. The municipality will include in the OCP detailed maps showing development constraints and environmental sensitivities throughout Whistler. The OCP will include a detailed environmental

assessment process for all proposed developments as defined in the Protected Areas Network strategy.

7. The municipality will continually upgrade its environmental information base, as needed and as funds are available.

8. Land within Whistler with special environmental significance will be protected where possible. The Official Community Plan, in conjunction with the Recreation Master Plan and Corridor Recreation Trail Management Plan (May 2009), will emphasize maintaining natural environments within the resort, particularly watersheds, areas that have high wildlife productivity, scarce habitats or environments or areas that have special value to the community.

9. As the resort and community develop, the pressures on fish and wildlife are increasing. Fish and wildlife populations within the resort are considered to be an important aspect of the resort experience and should be enhanced. The municipality will take an active role in working with the Ministry of Environment to find ways to minimize impacts of development on habitats and wildlife, to maintain and encourage the presence of wildlife in the area including habitat protection and fish stocking and to minimize conflicts without removing wildlife. This policy includes a commitment to take a more active role in protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats in Whistler.

10. The municipality will develop standards for outdoor lighting and will continue to limit outdoor illumination levels to provide a high quality resort experience by balancing the need for night time safety with the desire to avoid diminishing the beauty of the night sky.

11. The desire to maintain and enhance the quality of watercourses within the municipality and neighbouring regions will be reflected in the design and standards of municipal water and wastewater treatment facilities. All facilities to supply drinking water and to collect treat and dispose of wastewater effluent will be operated in such a manner as to meet or exceed all provincial and federal requirements and to reflect the extreme importance of environmental protection to a mountain resort.

12. The municipality will work with Transport Canada to address noise impacts from aircraft over flight.

13. The municipality will generally not allow any uses or activities that involve a risk of generating toxic or hazardous substances that can cause soil, water or air contamination. It will require techniques that are compliant with RMOW Bylaw 1822 (2007), A Bylaw to Regulate the Nonessential and Cosmetic Use of Pesticides within the RMOW, for pest and weed control. Where appropriate, the municipality will make project approvals conditional on the completion of a satisfactory agreement governing the use and monitoring of any substances that cause a risk of contamination.

## PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

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### Vision

Whistler's sensitive and important ecosystems as well as connectivity corridors are protected and thriving. Through the implementation of the Protected Areas Network (PAN) OCP bylaw amendments, a more transparent and consistent development approval process exists in Whistler. This protects the natural environment within the RMOW.

People who own property to which the PAN policy applies are responsible for conducting an environmental screening process and preparing development plans that balance economic expectations with environmental protection.

## Current Reality

In 2001, the RMOW developed the Whistler Environmental Strategy, a precursor to the Whistler 2002 and Whistler2020 vision and planning documents. In it, the development of a Protected Areas Network was identified.

The initial draft of the PAN OCP Bylaw Amendment, No. 1729 received first reading by Council in November 2005. A revised PAN OCP bylaw amendment received second reading on October 20, 2008, and a public hearing for the bylaw took place on November 3, 2008. Given current workload and resource priorities, the completion of the PAN policy will be incorporated into the current OCP update process.

The PAN policy identifies Whistler's sensitive and important ecosystems and connectivity corridors; designates levels of protection; establishes policies, objectives and guidelines; and establishes the environmental review process.

## Current Policies and Principles

1. All public and private development proposals lying within a floodplain or along a watercourse, and/or potentially impacted by a site specific hydrologic hazard(s), including flooding and/or inundation, may require geotechnical and hydrologic assessment to ensure that adequate protection measures will be incorporated into project design, in accordance with provincial flood proofing requirements.
2. The Municipality will not approve development on lands subject to severe geologic hazards, including (but not limited to) soil erosion and slippage, rock fall, debris flows, or snow and mud avalanching.
3. The Municipality will restrict or prohibit the development of land that would adversely affect water quantity or quality in watercourses. To the extent possible, the Municipality will control access into the watershed used for the Municipal water supply, and will seek full cooperation from all applicable government agencies, as well as resource companies, to comply with the restricted access provisions.
4. The Municipality will restrict or prohibit the development of land that would adversely affect water quantity or quality of an aquifer.
5. The Municipality will restrict or prohibit the placing of fill or debris in any natural watercourse or on lands that could lead to the discharge of deleterious materials into a watercourse, unless adequate mitigative design and construction measures acceptable to the Municipality and applicable federal/provincial agencies are implemented.
6. The Municipality will require stream and ravine setbacks determined through the Riparian Areas Regulation assessment process. Setback areas will remain undisturbed, and are required adjacent all watercourses identified in the PAN maps. This map shows 30m setbacks from all streams (all waterbodies connected to fish habitat). Where past disturbances has severely impacted native vegetation within the buffer zone, planting of appropriate native species may be required as a condition of development approval.
7. The Municipality considers environmental protection of all natural watercourses, water bodies, and wetlands to be of paramount importance, but will encourage outdoor recreation uses of these areas, where such use can be shown to be compatible with preservation and enhancement objectives, on a site by site basis.

8. The Municipality will require that all development incorporates adequate drainage detention/retention facilities to ensure that there will be no or minimal net increase in downstream runoff.
9. All developments, other than ski lifts and directly related facilities, on lands where 40% or more of the gross parcel area is in excess of 30% slope, may be subject to guidelines or policies adopted as Council policy for development on difficult terrain.
10. The Municipality will prohibit any development, other than ski lift and directly related recreation facilities, in sub alpine environments.
11. Where possible, the Municipality will work closely with provincial and federal government agencies and will incorporate appropriate government guidelines and regulations in its Environmental Screening Process. The Municipality will actively encourage all government agencies to respect the policies of the OCP when making decisions on resource exploration or use, and where applicable, will consider the equivalency of other governmental Environmental Impact Assessment requirements or regulations, on a case by case basis.
12. The Municipality will actively encourage the Ministry of Forests and the Cheakamus Community Forest to work within the Environmental Screening process and environmental guidelines to protect the scenic quality and biophysical resources of the Municipality and surrounding lands.
13. The Municipality will actively encourage the appropriate mining regulatory agencies to work within the Environmental Screening process and environmental guidelines to protect the scenic quality and biophysical resources of the Municipality and surrounding lands.
14. The Municipality will actively discourage the installation of the 500kv Kelly Lake Cheekeye transmission line through the Municipality due to concerns about the health hazard of electromagnetic fields and the adverse impact the project could have on Whistler's growing international status as a year round resort.
15. The Municipality will try to achieve the general objective of maintaining high visual quality along Highway 99 by, wherever possible, requiring a 20 metre vegetated buffer to be retained on lands that abut the highway right of way.

## WHISTLER'S INTEGRATED STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

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### Vision

Whistler's stormwater infrastructure reliably and efficiently protects property, water quality and water quantity goals.

Whistler's land use goals are complemented by the integration of sustainable technologies and systems that support the resort community. Whistler's water provision and discharge practices and infrastructure emulate the natural systems not drawing more water than nature is able to provide. Volumes of effluent discharged into the Cheakamus River are lower than they were in the past and the wastewater is clean and readily assimilated without disturbing aquatic habitat or downstream water uses.

This system allows community use and recreation of natural areas while protecting natural habitat and ecology. It recognizes that land development and environmental protection can be balanced while providing public safety.

## Current Reality

The Whistler Valley is known for its natural environment and recreational values. Water quality in streams and lakes is vital to safe human recreational use, aesthetics and the protection of ecosystem functioning and aquatic life, such as fish and macro invertebrates.

The municipality-wide stormwater objectives for the RMOW are simple, straightforward and should be applied to all watersheds and areas of development within the municipality. These objectives include:

1. Protect human life and safety.
2. Protect and maintain the existing health of the watershed.
3. Provide guidance to property owners and developers to help protect the watershed health and allow development in accordance with the Whistler2020 vision and sustainability goals.

The goal of stormwater management is to maintain as closely as possible, the natural pre-development flow pattern and water quality in the receiving watercourse. Detention facilities such as ponds, oversized storage pipes, underground tanks and diversions can reduce high flows, and store them at pre-development rates.

## Current Policies and Principles

1. Water supply, wastewater management and flood control infrastructure minimize energy requirements and favour sustainably managed materials and resources.
2. Watershed-based management approaches and policies guide and integrate overlapping land and resource values including (but not limited to) development infrastructure, forests, habitat, recreation, fisheries and aquifers.
3. Effective stormwater management and flood control measures are in place and replicate natural hydrological systems and functions as much as possible. For example, Cheakamus Crossing Stormwater Management is intended to maintain existing runoff levels and pre-development flows. Stormwater detention ponds, built for the day skier lots, controls flows and reduces sediment and other contaminants reaching Fitzsimmons Creek.
4. Flood control systems are maintained at a high level of emergency preparedness, where risks are managed proactively, effectively and efficiently.
5. Whistler's stormwater management approach works toward and within the Whistler 2020 vision of a sustainable future for Whistler.
6. Design guidelines are in place for developers and engineers. These guidelines describe how design should incorporate measures to minimize and mitigate the impacts of development in the naturally forested watersheds of the RMOW.
8. Whistler employs reduced road widths as well as reduced building footprints, which builds a compact community that encourages walking while preserving hydrologically significant features such as floodplain and wetland areas.

## WATER STEWARDSHIP

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### Vision

Whistler's water provision and discharge practices as well as infrastructure emulate natural systems by not drawing more water than nature is able to provide. Volumes of effluent discharged into the Cheakamus River are lower than they were in the past and the wastewater is clean and readily assimilated without disturbing aquatic habitat or downstream water uses.

Whistler's water strategy is concerned with providing a dependable supply of high quality water for appropriate uses. It focuses on the entire water system, including sourcing, distribution, use and disposal as well as addresses both physical infrastructure and management practices. The scope of this strategy also extends to flood control and watershed management approaches.

Whistler's water resources provide a dependable supply of healthy water to meet the long-term needs of people, other species and nature. Water supply is distributed readily, equitably and affordably and is managed proactively within the context of effective and efficient emergency preparedness. Residents and visitors are educated about and encouraged to protect and conserve natural water resources.

Whistler's potable water supply system delivers water of excellent quality, which meets or exceeds all relevant health standards and meets benchmark aesthetic standards whenever possible. Potable water source protection is optimized with a multi-barrier approach.

Healthy streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands support thriving populations of fish, wildlife and aquatic invertebrates.

### Current Reality

Whistler's waterworks has over 120 km of water pipes and its supply area covers more than 15 square kilometers with a 24-hour pressurized supply to more than 8,000 connections. The municipality supplies its water from a combination of surface water and groundwater supplies, namely 21-Mile Creek, 21-Mile Creek Well, Alpine wells, Community wells.

In Whistler it is required that all buildings are serviced with municipal water, with the exception of Function Junction, which is serviced by a private operator. Most municipal parks use well water. The Resort Municipality of Whistler, like all water providers, is faced with water leakage in its existing water system. These leaks could be on private property or in the distribution system, both are being addressed.

During dry summer months, the existing storage system is under stress to maintain adequate water levels for standard domestic consumer and fire fighting needs. The high summer demands appear to be due to two main items; "timer controlled" irrigation systems that do not take daily rainfall or soil moisture content into account, and "flow through" cooling systems that use large quantities of domestic water to cool air conditioning and refrigeration systems. Although the perception is that Whistler is water-rich, a strong water conservation ethic needs to be developed to minimize further withdrawals from natural systems as well as the need to invest in new and expensive water infrastructure.

### Current Policies and Principles

1. Water Conservation: In Living Water Smart: B.C.'s Water Plan, the Province outlines its targets for water conservation, including:

- » Water use in B.C. will be 33% more efficient by 2020;
  - » 50% of new municipal water needs will be acquired through conservation by 2020;
  - » Water laws will provide incentives to be water efficient by 2012; and
  - » New approaches to water management will address the impacts from a changing water cycle, increased drought risk, and other impacts on water caused by climate change by 2012.
2. **Water Wise Whistler:** Develop a comprehensive social marketing campaign on water conservation. A social marketing campaign for water conservation uses public norms and pressure to motivate water conservation behavior.
  3. **Volume-Based Water Fees:** Volume based water pricing results in water users paying for what they use. The suggested strategy includes a fee based on the amount of water consumed, but also a fee for the peak flow potential.
  4. **Water Quality Monitoring – stormwater and streams/lakes:** a comprehensive water quality monitoring program in partnership with the Ministry of Environment developed water quality objectives for key water bodies and monitors water quality trends over time. Targets, triggers and actions are identified to use the monitoring data for decision making.

## CHEAKAMUS COMMUNITY FOREST

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### Vision

The Cheakamus Community Forest (CCF) is a partnership between the RMOW, Lil'wat Nation and Squamish Nation that showcases high standards of eco-forestry to the world and places forest harvesting decisions in local hands. The CCF actively works with local stakeholders to develop forest harvesting and management plans that benefit the larger community, such as protecting viewsheds, cultural assets, important habitats, and combining logging activities with trail building.

The CCF Society seeks continual input on each year's harvesting plans from the public and stakeholder groups such as commercial recreation operators and the Whistler Off Road Cycling Association (WORCA), the local mountain bike club with several hundred members, to ensure that the plan works for the community and businesses that rely on the forest. This dialogue did not occur when a private logging company controlled the tenure for the area.

### Current Reality

The opportunity to participate in the community forest program arose when the Ministry of Forests and Range announced that the timber harvest volume for the area around Whistler would become available for a new tenure, or license, holder. In 2009, the CCF signed a 25-year tenure license with the Province of British Columbia for the forest land surrounding Whistler. Representatives from each of the partners sit on the CCF Society Board, who oversee planning, public consultation and management of forest operations.

The area of the CCF totals 30,260 hectares, which is comprised of a combination of old growth forest, second growth forest, alpine areas, rock, development, streams and LRMP-designated wildlands. Of this, approximately 15,000 hectares are protected from commercial harvesting by mechanisms such as Land & Resource Management Plan Wildland Zoning, Old Growth Management Area status,

riparian setbacks or Ungulate Winter Range status. The community forest tenure carries a legal obligation mandated by the Ministry of Forests to harvest 20,000 cubic metres of wood per year.

The CCF is working with the non-profit organization Ecotrust Canada to custom design an ecosystem-based management forestry plan with a sustainable harvest level that will not harm sensitive habitat or destroy views, scenery and First Nation cultural values. It is also working toward achieving Forest Stewardship Council certification.

### Public Consultation Process

The CCF Society reaches out to the community through open houses, newspaper articles, workshops, presentations and site tours with local organizations such as AWARE and WORCA, and an extensive stakeholders' email list, and will continue to do so. Open houses will be held in the spring and fall of each year to review proposed harvesting plans and work done in the preceding season. This is a community forest and will be more successful when the public shares its priorities and concerns with the CCF.

### Current Policies and Principles

1. A community forest is a forestry operation managed by a local government, community group, or First Nation for the benefit of the community. Community forests help communities diversify their local forest economies. These are area-based tenures, which allow communities to manage harvesting operations as well as other values such as trails and recreation sites, wildlife, water supply, and scenic views.
2. The RMOW has long recognized the primary importance of sound land management on the views and watersheds of the area to support the long-term economic, social and ecological viability of the resort community and to the regional economy. The CCF clearly recognizes that the natural beauty of the area is a strong draw for tourism and has those values at the top of mind when planning community forest operations.
3. The CCF will provide annual forums to engage, communicate, and identify issues from the general public and commercial recreation interests regarding all forest management activities under this plan.
4. The CCF will develop and implement an ecosystem based management plan that reflects the goals and principles of the partners' respective land use and sustainability plans. The Forest Stewardship Plan will develop its objectives based on the EBM plan and community input.
5. The CCF will carry out all timber harvesting and road construction, modification or deactivation in consideration of the scale necessary to meet established scenic objectives from the paved public roads and from the prominent viewshed positions from the major congregation areas atop Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains as shown on the Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) map.

### Resources

Limited Partnership Agreement  
 Ecosystem Based Management Plan  
 Cheakamus Community Forest Management Plan  
 Cheakamus Community Forest Forest Stewardship Plan

## WHISTLER LAND TRUST

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### Vision

A Whistler Land Trust exists that allows important and sensitive pieces of land within Whistler to be protected in perpetuity.

### Current Reality

Across North America, land conservancy trusts provide the structure and legal tools to allow individual community contributions to purchase and protect sensitive lands in perpetuity. A Land Trust is a non-profit, charitable organization committed to the long-term protection of natural and/or cultural heritage. A land trust may own land itself, or it may enter into conservation covenants with property owners to protect or restore natural or heritage features on the owner's land. Land trusts also engage in stewardship, restoration and management of lands.

### Current Policies and Principles

1. Explore opportunities with partners for creating a land trust in Whistler.
2. Explore conservation options such as conservation covenants, land donations, tax incentives, and land purchases.

## FITZSIMMONS CREEK MANAGEMENT PLAN - TO BE COMPLETED

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### Vision

Whistler has a comprehensive management plan to streamline gravel removal in balance with fish habitat requirements.

### Current Reality

The RMOW has completed construction of the debris barrier in 2009, and is working with Ministry of Environment, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Inspector of Dikes office to develop a comprehensive Fitzsimmons Creek gravel management plan. It is anticipate to be completed and implemented in 2011.

### Current Policies and Principles

The Fitzsimmons Creek gravel management plan will be implemented through a management team comprised of members of each of the agencies involved, and a technical team to advise on questions of a more detailed, technical nature.

## BEAR MANAGEMENT

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### Vision

The Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) has received provincial designation as a Bear Smart Community and continues to be engaged in reducing human/bear conflicts through partnership with key organizations such as the Ministry of Environment, Conservation Officer Service, Carney's Waste Systems and the Get Bear Smart Society.

## Current Reality

The Resort Municipality of Whistler is actively engaged in reducing human-bear conflicts through partnership with key organizations such as the Ministry of Environment, Conservation Officer Service, Carney's Waste Systems and the Get Bear Smart Society.

A group of stakeholders formed the Whistler Bear Working Group in late 2002. Membership includes Get BearSmart, BC Ministry of Environment, Conservation Officer Service, Whistler Blackcomb, Carney's Waste Systems, RCMP, the municipality, and the BC Conservation Foundation Bear Aware Coordinator, as well as a number of other interested parties who join meetings from time to time.

In 2003, a preliminary bear hazard assessment was prepared by Wayne McCrory, RPBio, McCrory Wildlife Services Ltd, of the lands falling in the boundaries of the RMOW. This report considered relative risk of a variety of situations and examined data from a variety of sources.

The Ministry of Environment Whistler Black Bear Aversive Conditioning study was also completed and examined the practical utility of a variety of non-lethal aversive conditioning methods for responding to problem black bear behaviour in a relatively attractant-free community. These techniques are still in use in Whistler.

Whistler has applied for Bear Smart Community status which is anticipated to be received in 2011.

## Current Policies and Principles

1. The RMOW Garbage Disposal and Wildlife Attractants Bylaw No. 1861 (2009) requires that every owner or occupier of a commercial, industrial, institutional and tourist accommodation building shall provide a garbage storage site located inside a building or within a wildlife proof enclosure
2. Communicate the community vision that supports Bear Smart principles and recognizes the primary goal, which is to improve public safety and reduce property damage by significantly reducing dependency of bears on garbage and other non-natural attractants.
5. Reduce availability of other attractants (landscaping plants, fruit trees, birdfeeders etc) through public education, bylaw enforcement, and bear smart land use planning.
6. Maintain and support the public education program.
7. Maintain and support the Whistler Bear Working Group.
8. Modify bylaws and implement zero-tolerance compliance enforcement.
9. Include bear smart community principles in the OCP for green space development and management planning.

## Resources

Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan for RMOW (Oct. 2009)  
 Bear Hazard Assessment (McCrory 2004)  
 Bear Response Officer Annual Reports

## INVASIVE SPECIES

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### Vision

The existence of invasive species in Whistler is eliminated and prevented. Whistler is committed to retaining, restoring and maintaining healthy populations of indigenous plant and animal life while discouraging invasive species within developed areas.

Through Whistler 2020, the RMOW has committed to protect native biodiversity locally. The RMOW supports the Sea to Sky Invasive Species Council to help meet this commitment. The spread of known invasive, exotic species of plants is monitored. Where possible, work is carried out to eliminate invasive species before extensive spreading occurs.

### Current Reality

Whistler's native biodiversity faces serious threats from the influx of alien invasives along with habitat fragmentation. The resort community has undergone significant development over the past four decades, resulting in habitat fragmentation and the spread of aggressive alien plant species in Whistler from well established areas in Squamish and north along Highway 99.

The RMOW Environmental Services department developed an Invasive Species Management Plan and the municipality also fully participates in the Sea to Sky Invasive Species Council to pool resources and address corridor wide issues that may affect Whistler.

Whistler's Invasive Species Management Plan is intended to cover all invasive species, both terrestrial and aquatic from microbe to mammals in Whistler. The purpose of the plan is provide a framework to minimize economic, environmental and human harm from invasive species by acting on seven goals of coordination, prevention, early detection, rapid response, control and management, research and risk assessment, and education and outreach.

The RMOW Invasive Species Management Plan is intended to foster a proactive collaborative approach involving a wide range of representatives within Whistler and extending out through the Sea to Sky Corridor.

### Current Policies and Principles

1. Improve cooperation and coordination among all departments within the municipality, landowners and land users by establishing a framework to provide community-wide leadership.
2. Provide the necessary resources for the municipality to increase the level of invasive plant management undertaken by individuals within the community.
3. Enact local government legislation to manage invasive species and to prevent the introduction of new invasive species to Whistler.
4. Improve compliance with current legislation regarding the introduction, spread and control of invasive plants.
5. Increase capacity building and public awareness around invasive species management on private land.
6. Coordinate a system for the early detection and eradication of new invasive species that arrive in Whistler, and monitor these populations' impacts and any expansion.

7. Establish a comprehensive local inventory of invasive plants in Whistler.
8. Ensure that all areas of the Sea to Sky Corridor implement a regional approach to invasive plant management.
9. Improve the management of invasive aquatic plant species through the necessary technical expertise and funding resources.
10. Identify and promote coordinated research to increase knowledge and awareness about invasive plant biology, ecology and management options and ecosystem restoration.

## BIODIVERSITY

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### Vision

The RMOW, through its progressive, strategic community planning and policy framework, Whistler 2020, has committed to protect native biodiversity locally. The RMOW has undertaken several initiatives including the Protected Area Network Strategy to help meet this commitment. Indigenous plants and species in the Whistler valley are well documented and monitored so that trends are identified early and actions taken to prevent decline.

Native plants continue to thrive in the Whistler valley and invasive species are monitored and controlled such that they do not pose a threat. Important and sensitive ecosystems with high biodiversity values are protected through various legal and policy tools.

### Current Reality

At all scales, the two greatest threats to native biodiversity are habitat loss, and displacement of native species by alien invasives. The development of the Whistler valley over the last 40 years has created both of these conditions. As identified in Whistler2020, the municipality is committed to reversing the trend by careful land management and better understanding the species that live here.

The RMOW Biodiversity Framework (Golder 2008) identifies how linkages between species data and habitat data can be developed, and in turn how that information can be used to manage for the conservation of biodiversity through specific monitoring and management response protocols that are consistent with Whistler2020. The framework outlines a multi-tiered approach for the use of existing and future data.

Largely through the efforts of the Whistler Biodiversity Project, supported by scientists and community members with municipal and non-governmental support, knowledge of the number and distribution of plant and animal species in Whistler has increased more than four-fold in the last 5 years.

Whistler Council also signed on to Countdown 2010, which is one of many International Year of Biodiversity initiatives. The RMOW has committed to help reach the 2010 Biodiversity Target, which is to "achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth" by launching the Whistler Biodiversity Challenge 2010.

### Current Policies and Principles

1. Evaluate future proposed land development-related amendments to Whistler's OCP and the Zoning Bylaw against specified criteria for environmental protection; locating new development and land uses in "least environmentally sensitive areas."

2. Impose mandatory conditions on new developments, such as prohibiting the landscaping use of invasive plant species that could supplant native species and biodiversity, and establishing habitat buffer areas and connectivity corridors.
3. Uphold clear measures and related guidelines to protect, maintain, restore and enhance local biodiversity and ecosystem integrity through the Protected Areas Network.
4. Demonstrate municipal commitments to environmental stewardship by meeting the Whistler2020 strategy “descriptions of success”.
5. Continue to support research into local native species diversity, invasive species, species-habitat relationships, and the distribution and status of critical ecosystems and species-at-risk in Whistler to establish a foundation for management decision-making.
6. Incorporate the spatial and attribute data being collected through such research into the municipal Geographic Information System (GIS), and also collect and incorporate additional data from municipal operational activities, to develop a feedback and guidance system for management.
7. Revise the indicators currently identified in the Whistler2020 community monitoring program to better reflect the status of biodiversity conservation and species at risk.

## SUSTAINABLE PLASTICS POLICY

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### Vision

A reduced volume of plastic is distributed for one-time uses. Residents and visitors have adopted the use of reusable bags.

### Current Reality

As a first step in the Sustainable Plastics Policy, Council passed a motion in November 2009 to voluntarily ban the distribution of thin-film plastic bags in Whistler and also approved that staff amend the Business Regulation Bylaw so businesses could no longer hand out thin film plastic bags and could only distribute 100% compostable bags.

Prior to the November Council presentation, staff met with several retailers, the Chamber of Commerce, and attended a Hotel Association meeting in Whistler and received support of a full ban on plastic bags in Whistler. Engagement with the commercial sector will continue as the policy is developed.

### Current Policies and Principles

The Sustainable Plastics Policy is a long term action identified in the Five Year Financial Plan 2009-2014. It is intended to provide Whistler’s guests and residents with a regulatory framework designed to prove the concept of zero waste in the case of plastic bags through innovation, communication and education.

Amend the Business Regulation Bylaw so businesses may only distribute reusable cloth bags.

## AIR QUALITY

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### Vision

The Sea to Sky Corridor continues to enjoy clean, healthy air. Whistler's healthy air is due in part to an integrated planning approach. Clean air will contribute to Whistler residents' and guests' enjoyment of the natural surroundings and help them to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Due to the cleaner air, everyone benefits from improved quality of life, and visitors will come here to breathe our fresh air and enjoy our panoramic views.

The RMOW will continue to identify and develop innovative best practices for air quality management and share results of actions.

### Current Reality

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor currently enjoys relatively clean, healthy air. However, trends indicate that ambient concentrations of air pollutants in the Sea-to-Sky Airshed are occasionally at levels that can have adverse effects on human health. This trend indicates that air quality could deteriorate if emissions are not proactively managed.

To offset the trend, air quality will improve beyond 2010 through the use of good planning principles such as Smart Growth, new technologies, and clean energy sources. We will continue to consider air quality and its contributions towards our goals in all planning processes, such as climate change initiatives. All residents and businesses will recognize that the quality of air is connected to all aspects of communities' activities. In addition to protecting residents' and visitors' health, maintaining good air quality and prevention of smog is especially important for this region due to its economic dependence on tourism and recreation.

There are a few key factors that will influence air quality in the Sea to Sky Airshed over the next 10 to 20 years. The most significant factor is transportation choice. By far, single occupant vehicle travel is the dominant transportation mode in the corridor. The influence of other key factors - population growth, increased tourism, continued urban sprawl, and expansion of the highway- have the potential to dramatically increase the impact of transportation choice over the next few decades. As well, larger scale transportation decisions in the Cascadia Corridor (which extends from Whistler in the north, to Medford, Oregon in the south), and planning decisions made through the Georgia Basin Action Plan may influence decision-making in the Sea-to-Sky Air Shed.

The Sea-to-Sky Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) is a regional, collaborative, action plan for protecting air quality in the Sea-to-Sky Air Shed. The Sea to Sky Clean Air Society formed in 2010 and consists of provincial, regional and municipal government representatives of the corridor, transit companies, utility companies and local industry, continues to develop and implement the plan. In addition to transportation sources, the AQMP will also need to address other significant sources of pollution such as space heating (natural gas, propane and wood stoves), as well as off-road vehicles and machinery since these emission sources produce the majority of emissions in the air shed. Emissions from marine transportation are also a concern in the corridor.

### Current Policies, Principles, and Actions

1. Promote opportunities for resident and visitor access to public transportation and other transportation alternatives.
2. Reduce vehicle idling through education and bylaws.

3. Promote use of best available technology and practices for vehicles, construction and related equipment.
4. Develop airshed-wide Smoke Control Strategy.
5. Develop GHG emission reduction targets and plans.
6. Promote use of alternative energy sources.

## NEXT STEPS

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The Natural Environment Background report is a compilation of current practices. Through the OCP update process, the RMOW will draw on public input and best practices to round out this program and more fully reflect the interests of the residents of Whistler.



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