

EXPLORING COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF PACIFIC SPIRIT REGIONAL PARK:  
THE QUESTION OF SAFETY

by

ELLEN BAILEY BIRD

B.Sc., Mount Allison University, 2009  
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## Abstract

This study explores how community members perceive Pacific Spirit Regional Park and their recommendations for enhancing experiences within the park. Using an exploratory approach to engage ten Pacific Spirit Regional Park users, usage, behaviour, preferences, concerns, and recommendations were discussed with emphasis on participants' perceptions of safety in the park. In a small focus group, participants provided additional insights into the presented recommendations. Recommendations fell into the categories of terrain and physical environment, accessibility, people in the park, and park watch. The study serves as a case study for other park organizations wishing to explore context-specific insights into enhanced experiences. It concludes by providing a list of recommendations for Metro Vancouver Regional Parks to consider.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Tony Dorsey for his advice and guidance during this research and for igniting my passion for community engagement. Thank you to Richard Wallis, Susanne Stewart-Patterson and Theresa Harding at Metro Vancouver Regional Parks (West Area) for providing thoughtful feedback and background context to this research. Thank you to my family, friends and SCARP colleagues for their support and encouragement along the way. Finally, I would like to extend my deep gratitude to the participants in this study for volunteering their time and putting their faith in me as a researcher; their dedication to enhancing the park for the betterment of the community has been my inspiration throughout this project.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	1
List of Figures and Tables.....	4
Preface .....	5
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	6
1.1    Problem Statement.....	6
1.2    Research Questions .....	7
1.3    Goals and Objectives.....	7
1.4    Report Organization.....	7
Chapter 2 Literature.....	9
2.1    Context.....	9
2.2    Threats .....	11
2.3    Behaviour .....	11
2.4    Solutions.....	11
Chapter 3 Methods.....	13
3.1    An Exploratory Approach.....	13
3.2    Case Study.....	14
3.2.1    The Case .....	14
3.3    Methods Applied.....	17
3.3.1    Background Data Collection .....	17
3.3.2    One-On-One Interviews .....	17
3.3.3    Focus Group .....	17
Chapter 4 Findings .....	19
4.1    Use of the Park.....	19
4.2    Effects on Park Use .....	20
4.3    Terrain and Physical Environment .....	23
4.3.1    Runaway Horses.....	23
4.3.2    Uneven Footing.....	25
4.3.3    Mud-Heavy Trails .....	26
4.3.4    Summary: .....	27
4.4    Accessibility.....	28

4.4.1	Toilet Facilities .....	28
4.4.2	Trail Designation and Signage:.....	30
4.4.3	Summary: .....	31
4.5	People in the Park .....	33
4.5.1	Destinations .....	34
4.5.2	Groups .....	35
4.5.3	Summary: .....	37
4.6	Park Watch .....	38
4.6.1	Information Availability.....	39
4.6.2	On-Site Office .....	40
4.6.3	Community Stewards .....	41
4.6.4	Summary: .....	42
Chapter 5 Conclusion .....		43
Recommendations: .....		44
References .....		45
Appendix A: Behavioural Research Ethics Certificate of Approval .....		47
Appendix B: Metro Vancouver Research Permit .....		48
Appendix C: Initial Contact Letter .....		50
Appendix D: Research Subject Consent Form.....		51

## List of Figures and Tables

**Figure 1.** Influences of personal context and personal values and concerns on perceptions, behaviour and preferred solutions regarding threats.

**Figure 2.** Context for human-environmental interactions in the landscape.

**Figure 3.** Methodology for producing recommendations for action in the Pacific Spirit Regional Park case study.

**Figure 4.** Pacific Spirit Regional Park trail map. Park illustrated in green.

**Figure 5.** Pedestrian-only gate in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

**Figure 6.** Sidewalk at University Boulevard and Blanca Street, Vancouver, BC.

**Figure 7.** Mud-heavy trail in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

**Figure 8.** Toilet facility located at 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

**Figure 9.** Trail signage at Sherry Sakamoto Trail and Top Trail in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

**Figure 10.** “Walk for Health” in Pacific Spirit Regional Park, hosted by the Green Club, a Chinese environmental organization in Vancouver, BC.

**Figure 11.** Information boards are located at major entrances to Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

**Figure 12.** Park Centre trailers located at 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Cleveland Trail.

**Table 1.** Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “terrain and physical environment” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

**Table 2.** Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “accessibility” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

**Table 3.** Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “people in the park” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

**Table 4.** Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “park watch” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

## Preface

This project was written as part of the requirements for the Masters of Science (Planning) degree at the School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia. My motivation for studying and practicing planning originated from my love for the natural environment and my interest in the various perspectives that must be considered and negotiated in the preservation of environmental assets.

To attend this Masters program, I moved across the country to live in the Dunbar neighbourhood near the University; there, I discovered that the neighbourhood bordered Pacific Spirit Regional Park – a place where I could exercise and enjoy being in nature at the same time. As neighbours and colleagues became aware of my use of the park, they warned me not to visit it alone and suggested it was unsafe. They referenced a murder which had taken place the previous April (2009). To my dismay, I began to feel fearful in the park and I frequented it significantly less often. These experiences inspired me to conduct this research investigating how community members perceive Pacific Spirit Regional Park and exploring ways in which their experiences could be enhanced, especially in regard to perceived safety.

This project does not examine actual safety levels of the park; it is an exploratory study of Pacific Spirit Regional Park user perceptions. It serves as a case study illustrating the fruitfulness of engaging community members and incorporating local knowledge in the planning process.

The recommendations in this report are not intended to reflect the views of all Pacific Spirit Regional Park users; rather they serve as starting points for decision makers to investigate further.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Urban parks are a necessary ingredient when planning a vibrant city and are highly desirable features for community members (Noiseux and Hostetler, 2010). They provide benefits by creating opportunities for physical activity and recreation (Lanarc Consultants Ltd., 1996), generate the psychological and restorative powers of nature (Gies, 2006), strengthen neighbourhood identity and community ties (BC Government Stewardship Series, 1995), promote local tourism and function as tourism attractions, and, environmentally, act as natural filters for pollutants and as habitat refuge for urban plants and animals. On an individual level, parks address community member's personal needs by providing places for solitude, for various recreational activities, to connect with nature, to entertain children, to provide scenic views, and for socialization.

Each characteristic or feature within a park has a role in enhancing certain benefits; though a feature that enhances one park benefit can detract from other potential benefits – the reverse can also be true where several benefits arise from one feature alone. For example, play areas in the park provide a space for family activity but may detract from the spiritual experiences that other park users seek in the park; or, clearing a patch of forest can enhance views as well as provide spaces for recreation and rest, but it can reduce the quality of habitat for many organisms. To strike an appropriate balance and to enhance users' experiences within a park, planners and managers need to consider the role the park is intended to play in the community and, more importantly, the community's specific desires. A clearer understanding of what these preferences are for the local population and a holistic view of the tradeoffs associated with park features and their effects on community benefits helps planners identify alternative balances within the park which could promote positive perceptions and experiences for park users.

Users' perceptions of personal safety in the park are an essential consideration in making management decisions, as they play an important role in influencing community members' use and enjoyment. As a driving influence on people's behaviours (Blobsaum & Hunecke, 2005), an influential factor in community support for parks (Harnik, 2006), and an element desired by almost everyone, perceived safety should be carefully considered in finding a balance of park features. Like other community needs, whether an initiative to enhance perceived safety is considered appropriate for a given park is dependent on how the initiative may affect other community values (both positively and negatively) and if there are alternatives that are more fitting to the nature of the park. In addition, the degree to which a user perceives a park as safe and regards personal safety as a key issue is influenced by the park context, its components, and the individual. Of course actual safety should be a high priority for park managers and understanding perceptions of safety and their effects can significantly enhance park management (Schroeder & Anderson, 1984); both actual and perceived safety have similar consequences and create problems that affect park managers and park users (Westover, 1985).



Though perceived safety is acknowledged as a significant indicator of use and enjoyment of parks (Westover, 1985), few studies have focused on how to improve perceptions of safety within parks. Even fewer identify and incorporate the other needs, values and expectations of local park users in assessing their findings and overall recommendations.

## 1.2 Research Questions

By integrating community engagement approaches into park planning and using Pacific Spirit Regional Park as a case study, this research demonstrates how locally generated insights can inform planning and management practices that address perceptions of safety and other complementary and competing park user values.

The research questions for this study are:

- A) How do park users perceive Pacific Spirit Regional Park?
- B) With this knowledge, how can their experiences be enhanced?
- C) Specifically focusing on perceived safety, what enhancements might be most appropriate given the context of this particularly park?

## 1.3 Goals and Objectives

My personal goals in undertaking this research on park planning and management are:

- To expand existing knowledge regarding approaches to enhancing perceived safety in park settings.
- To incorporate community insights that provide a context-specific perspective on park management practices.

The objectives for this research are:

- To serve as a case study for park planners and managers that demonstrates an approach for gathering community input to enhance context-specific management practices.
- To provide recommendations for the enhancement of park user experiences within Pacific Spirit Regional Park with specific regard for perceived safety.

## 1.4 Report Organization

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research questions, goals and objectives related to this study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of related studies regarding the interrelationships between landscape and people, threats that have been identified by park users, how safety perceptions have influenced behaviour, and identified solutions that enhance safety perceptions. Chapter 3 describes the methods and methodology used to gather and analyse the data for the research; this

chapter also situates the study in the context of Pacific Spirit Regional Park. Chapter 4 outlines the findings from the interviews and focus group, categorized by major themes identified and provides commentary on related literature. Finally, Chapter 5 consolidates key ideas and considerations that arose from the case study and a list of recommendations for Metro Vancouver Regional Parks to consider for the enhancement of Pacific Spirit Regional Park user experiences.

## Chapter 2 Literature

Past studies have investigated how usage and experience affect perceived safety and how values and concerns affect perceptions of the park. When studies have looked at threats, behaviour, and solutions, these issues have generally been explored singularly, without considering basic interrelating principles from relevant social science research. Studies have shown that factors influencing perception include the context of the target, the setting and the perceiver (Battistich and Aronoff, 1985). More specifically, that personal context (experiences, interests, feelings, etc.) influences one's values, concerns and general attitude towards something, affecting perceptions, behaviour, and desired results (Tourangeau and Rasinski, 1988). As illustrated in Figure 1, if these findings are applied to the context of perceived safety in parks, exploring all of these topics with a range of park users, can lead to more appropriate and sustainable recommendations for a given park and its users. Of course, the characteristics of the park, including land use, spatial extent, ownership type, type of landscape and cultural history associated with it (Gobster et al. 2007) also provide context for how park users will perceive threats. For the purposes of the present study, previous research findings regarding these important -but singularly studied- components are reviewed to first provide a basic understanding and then used in investigating the issues more holistically and systemically through a case study of Pacific Spirit Regional Park and its users.

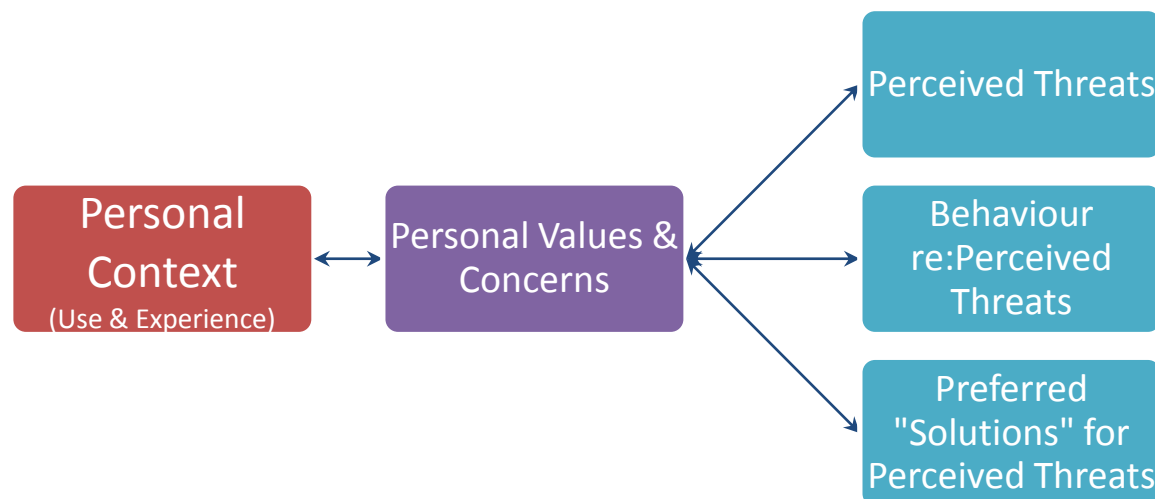


Figure 1. Influences of personal context and personal values and concerns on perceptions, behaviour and preferred solutions regarding threats.

### 2.1 Context

Gobster et al. (2007) conducted one of the few studies that acknowledged the interrelationship between landscape and people, illustrated in Figure 2, and that acknowledged that both park and personal characteristics influence a person's experiences and how those people can, in turn, influence the characteristics of the park. The study pointed out that in addition to the context of the landscape (or

park), personal traits including familiarity and past experiences in the park, current mood of the individual, personal expectations and intentions for entering the park, the type of activity (biking, working, reflecting), the social setting provided (with a companion, during a time of heavy use, in solitude), and other socio-cultural norms all affect how an individual will experience and perceive a landscape or park (Gobster et al., 2007).

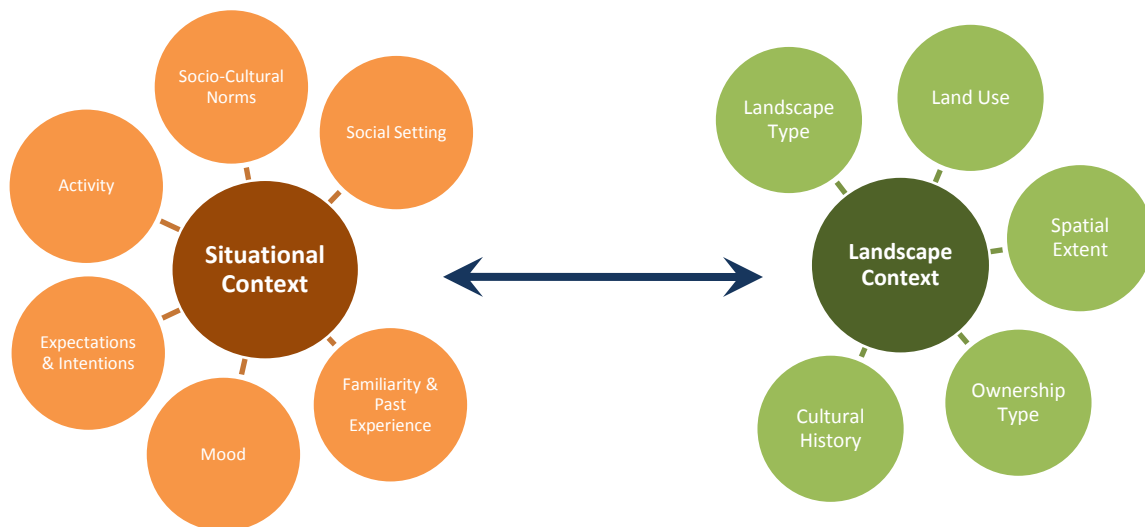


Figure 2. Context for human-environmental interactions in the landscape. *Adapted from Gobster et al., 2007.*

Environmental concern and regional identity have also been found by Carrus et al. (2005) to influence personal perceptions of parks; both were found to be positive predictors for community support of the two protected areas examined in their study. The media, of course, is known to be very influential in shaping public attitudes and extensive media coverage of crime in parks is thought to have given parks possibly unwarranted reputations as places of high crime risk (Schroeder & Anderson, 1984). The angle the story takes and the facts a report includes, overemphasizes or excludes are very influential in shaping public attitudes. The media's overemphasis of the risk of sexual assault in public spaces, for example, has been proven to discourage women from entering such areas (Blobaum & Hunecke, 2005).

Gender is a significant factor in determining attitudes and perceptions of parks (Westover, 1985). In a study where participants had to rate how safe they felt a given scene to be, women rated scenes to be less safe than men much more frequently and whereas men were more likely to anticipate a fight, women feared sexual assault (Nasar et al., 1983). Other characteristics such as age, race, education, and income level are also known to affect attitudes to public spaces (Westover, 1985).

## 2.2 Threats

Concerns that have been identified regarding safety (whether actual or perceived) in parks include those of recreational injuries (Stephens et al., 2005), dangerous wildlife (Webber, 1993; Thirgood et al., 2005), and, more extensively cited, criminal activity (Burgess et al., 1988; Blobaum and Hunecke, 2005). Stephens et al. (2005) studied how and when injuries occur in parks – finding that they are often soft tissues injuries that occurred most commonly while hiking, during daylight hours, and in the summer- to provide more insight for park managers hoping to reduce injuries and provide safer environments. In Vancouver, BC, many residents had concerns regarding coyotes in the city and the threat they posed to both humans and pets (Webber, 1993) and, elsewhere, humans fear of being killed or injured by other carnivores such as large cats, bears and wolves (Thirgood et al., 2005). However, over and above these threats, parks and other public spaces are thought to be threatening places because they are perceived to have high crime rates (Jacobs, 1961). These fears include those of teenage delinquency, theft, vandalism, violence, sexual abuse and child abduction (Burgess et al., 1988).

## 2.3 Behaviour

Blobaum & Hunecke (2005) argued that regardless of whether a space is actually safe, the perception of safety must not be overlooked, as it is the factor that influences people's behaviour. These alterations in behaviour exhibit themselves in a variety of ways: users avoid the park altogether –which may be dependent on such things as time of day and whether other people are around (Hilborn, 2009); users avoid particular areas of the park which are perceived as more dangerous –such as areas with poor lighting or denser foliage (Madge, 1996); users spend shorter periods of time in the park (Wolch et al., 2010) or restrict themselves to only using the park at the times they feel are safest (Bennett et al. 2007); users appease their fear by visiting parks in groups rather than individually (Madge, 1996); and users experience reduced enjoyment in using the park as a result of raised concerns and feeling self-defensive (Westover, 1985).

## 2.4 Solutions

Most research regarding recommendations to enhance park users' sense of safety relates to the fear of crime, though it should be noted that they may also be helpful in addressing other safety concerns as well. They include increasing policing and use, providing better park maintenance, and improving visual and locomotive access.

One of the most effective ways found to improve safety is to promote heavier park use (Thomas, 2007) because it would result in more witnesses, guardians, and people available to respond with help (Hilborn, 2009). Studies have suggested designing parks in ways that attract many different users (Thomas, 2007) and accommodate a range of activities and interests (Hilborn, 2009) by ensuring that they appeal to elderly, people with special needs, youth, etc. through activities and programs such as community gardens, educational displays (Thomas, 2007), walking clubs (Wolch et al., 2010), and other activity generators (Hilborn, 2009). Formal surveillance and active techniques that increase not only

natural guardians, but also park personnel and police presence, have also been suggested to help improve both actual and perceived safety (Hilborn, 2009).

Even in the absence of actual humans, evidence shows that simply seeing *signs* of human presence and park maintenance can give the impression that the park is cared for and watched over, contributing to users' perceived safety of the area (Thomas, 2007). Graffiti and litter have a negative effect on perceived safety for users (Schroeder & Anderson, 1984) and, along with other vandalism and dog fouling, act as signals to both users and potential offenders that no one is in charge of the park (Hilborn, 2009). Suggestions to reduce these negative sights have included designing park walls to discourage graffiti with minimal large flat surfaces and using textured materials (Thomas, 2007) and installing signage and waste receptacles to encourage personal responsibility (Hilborn, 2009). In addition, providing spaces with open mowed areas (rather than dense forest), with water bodies and features (Schroeder & Anderson, 1984), tree and grass maintenance (Kuo et al., 1998), and more generally manicured park settings (Bixler et al., 1994) contribute to the sense that the park is controlled and cared for and help to alleviate anxieties.

Improving visual access and locomotive access have also been found to reduce concerns about threats. Creating open areas plays a significant role in improving impressions of safety (Nasar et al., 1983) as people feel more vulnerable when their sight lines are blocked and there are hiding places for potential offenders; therefore, providing open prospect and clear sight lines is recommended to allow users to have unobstructed views of what lies ahead (Blobaum and Hunecke, 2005; Thomas, 2007). A number of adjustments to trail lengths, widths and borders have been found to positively contribute to overall visibility and perceived safety (Herzog and Kirk, 2005) whereas dense tress, high shrubbery, and building walls evidently contribute to users' fears (Blobaum & Hunecke, 2005).

Locomotive access, however, is thought to have a greater impact on perceptions of safety than visual access (Stamps, 2005) because although visual permeability is important in anticipating danger, opportunities to escape are critical in the face of actual danger (Blobaum & Hunecke, 2005). To avoid feelings of entrapment, Thomas (2007) recommended defining sub-areas of parks so that they have numerous and convenient entrances and exits, Hilborn, (2009) suggested designing predictable path patterns so that escape routes are more intuitive, and Herzog and Kutzli (2002) highlighted the importance of maintaining smooth, easy-to-use ground surfaces to improve movement choice.

Although the findings from these previous studies provide valuable insights into potential park management practices and are useful in analyzing the results of this study, many approached perceived safety through narrow lenses and missed opportunities for deeper exploration and community involvement. The next chapter details how this study attempts to pursue these opportunities for enriched results and the approach and methods employed to gather data.

## Chapter 3 Methods

This chapter outlines how this study adopts a more exploratory approach than previous studies, and how Pacific Spirit Regional Park was used as a case study that may be compared and contrasted to other parks. It also details the methods applied through context interviews, park user interviews, and a focus group. Research findings are presented in Chapter 4, forming the basis for the recommendations proposed at the end of the report.

### 3.1 An Exploratory Approach

Many previous studies investigating perceived safety assumed that:

- a) the demographics of park users are largely homogenous;
- b) safety is valued first and foremost; and/or
- c) implementing changes to enhance safety perceptions does not have a significant impact on other park values.

It would be erroneous to suggest –or worse, to carry out- management practices under these assumptions. We cannot take any component of a park and analyse it singularly; a more holistic approach that explores how the park is used, what park users value and fear about the park, and what they need for their experiences to be enhanced would result in longer-lasting and more effective results. Planners should consider the values of the park users, recognize that users have varied and diverse perspectives, and discuss the tradeoffs of proposed changes in depth ensuring that decisions are more fully understood and, thus more likely appropriate for a given park. Planners or managers are often considered experts, but expertise lies to a great extent within the community.

Though previous studies have consulted community members regarding aspects of their experiences, preferences and aversions, most have had narrow focuses, limiting the scope of participant responses. Herzog and Kirk's (2005) study, for example investigated how forests' pathway curvatures and border visibilities affected participants' levels of preference and perceived danger and drew conclusions based on their ratings of various photographs. Such studies lack the opportunity for participants to contribute alternative ideas or non-physical recommendations, they fail to bring out how the changes impact other values, nor do they consider if and how the community can become actively involved in enhancing these spaces. By encompassing a more exploratory approach and format, this study attempts to lessen the impacts of our assumptions regarding what topics are important to community members and to provide an opportunity for more creative recommendations to arise.

## 3.2 Case Study

A case study is a form of qualitative descriptive research that allows exploration and understanding of issues in the context of a particular complex, interrelated system or “case” (Zainal, 2007). Rather than focusing on finding results that are generalizable, an in-depth case study examines a number of considerations to provide more complete and holistic insights which are especially useful for community-based research (Johnson, 2006).

My objective of transforming park user insights into recommendations led me to borrow from several elements of Participatory Action Research as well. With the goal of producing not only knowledge but also recommendations for action itself, Participatory Action Research is an “evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry” (Shani and Pasmore, 1985). As shown in Figure 3, the recommendations for action presented in this report were first generated by participants in one-on-one interviews and later cycled back to participants in a focus group to generate new insights and for refinement of the recommendations and re-analysed to present a final list of recommendations.

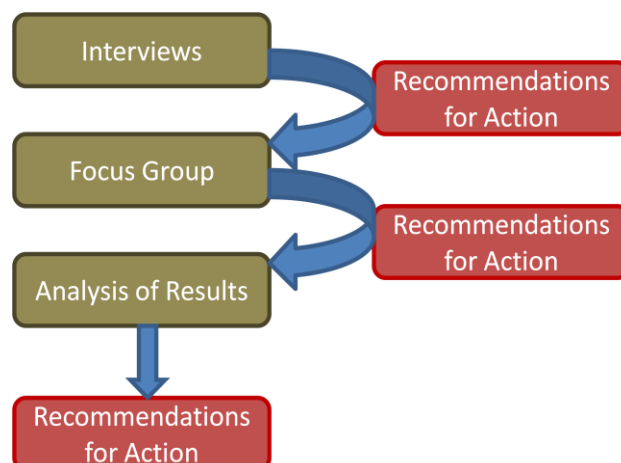


Figure 3. Methodology for producing recommendations for action in the Pacific Spirit Regional Park case study.

### 3.2.1 The Case

Pacific Spirit Regional Park encompasses 763 hectares of forest and foreshore and is located on the western end of the City of Vancouver, British Columbia, surrounding the University of British Columbia, as shown in Figure 4. To the east of the university is an expansive temperate rain forest with a number of walking, cycling and horseback riding trails; wrapping around the university, the park’s forested slopes lead to a number ocean beaches along the peninsula’s thin foreshore. The university developments and the differing landscapes create a geographic distinction between the park’s beaches and its forest on the east, often leading Pacific Spirit Regional Park users to refer to the forest as the



park and the foreshore as the *beaches* (the most popular of which, is the clothing optional Wreck Beach).



Figure 4. Pacific Spirit Regional Park trail map. Park illustrated in green. *Metro Vancouver, 2012.*

Traditionally used by the Musqueam First Nation and intensively logged after colonization, the land was set aside in 1907 by the government of British Columbia as part of the University Endowment Lands to fund the development of the University of British Columbia (Norman, Unknown Year). Although endowed to the university, the land was used recreationally by the public and several trails through the forest were developed by the community. After several cycles of support and opposition for various development proposals, in 1989 the land was conveyed to Metro Vancouver and established as a

regional park (Wallis, 2011) and today serves more than 1.5 million visitors per year. As a Metro Vancouver Regional District park, the land is governed such that emphasis is placed on environmental protection and ecological services given the great extent to urbanization in Metro Vancouver and the increasing value of these services (Harding, 2012).

Having never ceded property rights to the Crown or Canada, the Musqueam people identify the land now known as Pacific Spirit Regional Park as still part of their traditional territory (Musqueam Indian Band, 1976). In 1993, the Musqueam First Nation entered into a six stage BC Treaty Process and in 1995 declared ready to begin negotiations (Norman, Unknown Year). As a result of outstanding litigation related to the 2003 sale of the University Golf Course lands, the Musqueam acquired ownership of two parcels of land known as Block F and the Triangle Lands in Pacific Spirit Regional Park, totalling 22.3 hectares. The Musqueam also acquired the University Golf Course lands, Bridgeport Casino lands and a cash payment, all of which was established under the Reconciliation, Settlement, and Benefits Agreement in 2008 (Province of British Columbia, 2008). The BC Treaty process and negotiations are ongoing.

Pacific Spirit Regional Park contains a number of environmental areas of interest including Camosun Bog, an ecological reserve, rare plants, a marsh, and four salmon-bearing streams. Recreationally, the park provides designated and multi-use trails for walking, cycling, horseback riding, and off-leash dog-walking, and in addition it provides a handful of picnic areas, the widely popular beaches, and a means for commuters to travel from Vancouver neighbourhoods to the university (Wallis, 2011). The park attracts both local residents and tourists and is host to a number of volunteer and special interest groups closely associated with the park, including the Pacific Spirit Park Society, Catching the Spirit [Youth Society] and the Wreck Beach Preservation Society.

“Whether its development in the area bringing more people, or shortage of green space in general, people are looking for more park space and are increasingly passionate about what we [Pacific Spirit Regional Park] have...Finding the right balance between [the various] values is increasingly challenging.”

–Richard Wallis,  
*Metro Vancouver Regional Parks (West Area) Acting Manager (2011)*

In April 2009, Pacific Spirit Regional Park gained a lot of media attention when Wendy Ladner-Beaudry, a highly involved member of the community, was murdered on one of the park’s paths during daylight hours (CBC News, 2011). The case prompted several community members to voice concerns regarding their perceptions of Pacific Spirit Regional Park’s safety. The murder remains unsolved.

“Ladner-Beaudry's death has become "a shadow" in the neighbourhood that police want to help lift.”

–Peter Thiessen, RCMP Sergeant (CBC News Article, April 3, 2011)

## 3.3 Methods Applied

### 3.3.1 Background Data Collection

The background information for this project was collected through an extensive literature review and expert interviews. The literature review focused on previous studies of public perceptions of parks and, more specifically, techniques for improving perceptions of safety. Interviews were conducted with the Metro Vancouver Regional Parks (West Area) Community Development Coordinator to gain insights into the various types of people and groups in the park, the Metro Vancouver Regional Parks (West Area) Acting Area Manager to gain insights into park usage, operations, and history, and with an RCMP Officer at the University of British Columbia (UBC) Detachment to gain insights into the issues and history of safety in the park. A behavioural ethics approval certificate from the University of British Columbia and a Research Permit from Metro Vancouver were obtained prior to contacting potential research participants (See Appendix A and Appendix B respectively).

### 3.3.2 One-On-One Interviews

A number of types of park users were observed through my own regular use of the park and these were combined with the insights of Metro Vancouver Regional Parks' staff. After compiling a list of user types, organizations were identified and contact information was located through websites and requests for participation were disseminated via an email notice (See Appendix C). The list of user types was not exhaustive, nor did every type of park user identified agree to take part in the study; however it was recognized that the goal for this preliminary study was not to have *representation* of all user groups, but rather to incorporate a variety of perspectives. Ensuring representation from all interest groups was beyond the scope of this project and will need to be approached cautiously as opinions within interest groups can vary greatly. See Appendix D for the Interview Consent Form.

Ten very different park users participated in one-on-one interviews between May 2011 and July 2011, recorded by audiotape and transcribed. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were guided by questions regarding use of the park, pleasurable experiences in the park, items that detract from enjoying the park, and recommendations for enhancement of their experiences. Transcribed interviews were reviewed by means of content analysis considering reoccurring categories, defining themes, and reorganizing the information according to the identified themes.

### 3.3.3 Focus Group

Park users who participated in the one-on-one interviews were invited to take part in a one-hour focus group, conducted on December 6, 2011 at the Dunbar Community Centre. Four out of the ten interview participants attended the focus group. The researcher presented the themes identified and recommendations suggested from the interviews; in a group, the participants were asked to comment on, discuss, and develop further ideas regarding the findings and recommendations for each theme. Participants were prompted with the following questions:

- What do you think the benefits and drawbacks are for these recommendations?
- Are these recommendations fitting with the context of Pacific Spirit Regional Park?
- Can you think of other ideas that would better address these concerns?

Maps and photos of the park were present to assist participants in communicating their ideas. A note-taker was present to record the discussion. Information from the focus group was used in combination with information from the literature to analyse the recommendations in Chapter 4: Findings.

The four focus group participants exemplified a range of diversity in their ages, genders, interests, and uses of the park. Responses and recommendations from all the one-on-one interviews were presented to the group for discussion. Because the incorporation of the absent participants' perspectives was limited as the participants were not present to elaborate or discuss their perspectives, the tradeoffs discussed and concluded were more heavily influenced by the participants who had attended the focus group. Attendance by more participants and the involvement of a greater range Pacific Spirit Regional Park users should be considered by decision-makers as it would enrich the discussion and result, though it was beyond the scope of this project.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### 4.1 Use of the Park

Participants were asked to describe their use of the park as a way to open up discussion and to provide context regarding their perceptions of the park, its constituents and safety.

The main uses of the park fit into categories of:

- exercising,
- spending time with others, and
- pursuing personal interests.

Participants identified using the park for the following activities:

- cycling,
- jogging,
- horseback riding,
- walking (with and without dogs),
- picking berries<sup>1</sup>,
- botany and bog restoration,
- naturalism at the beaches, and
- viewing the sunset.

The majority of the participants visited the park in the company of others including:

- girlfriends/boyfriends,
- children,
- out-of-town guests,
- friends, and
- spouses.

On average, these park users spend 40 – 60 minutes in the park per visit and, while seven of the ten participants frequented the park multiple times in a week, the remaining three said they visited the park less than once a week. Participants tended to stick to favourite routes which started at convenient entry points (close to their home, near accessible parking, at a staircase leading to the beach) and usually walked in circular routes, exiting from the same point they started at. Those users who engaged in faster-paced activities such as biking or jogging tended to take longer routes, using a greater area of the park and those who brought small children and took more time to travel the trails tended to use smaller

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<sup>1</sup> Although several participants of this study referenced berry-picking in Pacific Spirit Regional Park, they appeared unaware that Greater Vancouver Regional District Bylaw No. 1048 prohibits berry-picking in regional parks. Berries provide food for park wildlife and propagate the plants that contribute to park vegetation and wildlife habitat.

routes – the result was that although the area covered was quite different for these activities, the time spent in the park was similar.

## 4.2 Effects on Park Use

While all the interviewees used Pacific Spirit Regional Park as a place to fulfill their needs and pursue their interests, when probed deeper, many participants divulged more specific details regarding how their perceptions of the park influenced their use.

Perceptions that the terrain was challenging, influenced some users to avoid hilly trails because of their back problems or simply for ease of movement, slow their run to a walk in bumpy areas, and to be cautious of a hill known to be difficult for equestrians. Others, who had preferences as to whether or not they wanted to encounter dogs and/or horses, would select trails based on their on-leash, off-leash or equestrian designations.

Perceptions relating to safety also played a large role in many users' habits in the park. Perceptions of low safety lead to avoidance or preference of certain areas causing some to stick to the park's perimeter, use busier areas and main paths in the park, and use familiar routes, as well as preference for certain times such as frequenting the park during daylight hours long before dusk. Others did not necessarily avoid areas, but rather they spent less time in areas they felt uncomfortable – causing them to hurry through areas where dogs were permitted to be off-leash or an area where suspicious activity was witnessed.

“I’ve heard one or two stories about people who have had scares in the park. When I’ve been there alone and it’s starting to get dark, I tend to look around me a little bit more and keep on the main paths and sometimes say to myself, “Maybe I shouldn’t have started [walking] so late.” Certainly the Wendy Ladner case started me walking on the edge for a while until I hooked up with friends, but I still think that’s a totally one off incident. But I think there’s potential there.”

– Research Participant #8 (2011)

Other participants said that they had a heightened awareness of their surroundings when using the park – especially after the murder of Wendy Ladner-Beaudry in 2009. For instance, one interviewee stated that in a particular section of the park she had stop talking with friends so that she could be more alert of any dangers. Some participants noted they would become more alert when the sun began to set, after seeing someone acting unusual, and one male user said that although he felt comfortable in the park, he was always concerned when he saw females alone on the trails. Related to these comments, a couple of the female participants noted that they felt like they needed to be on alert for their safety simply because of their sex and the necessity of protecting themselves from sexual predators.

“Women have to think about their personal safety more than men. I think as women we’re just socialized to think about that. For the right reasons too, we’re not as strong as men and we have to think about our personal safety.”

– *Research Participant #1 (2011)*

“I feel very safe; I feel that it’s our forest. But my husband worries when my daughters and I go in the park without him - he’s protective of us and that murder freaked him out.”

– *Research Participant #7 (2011)*

Just as some were influenced by the common belief that women are at greater risk, many participants were impacted by the perceptions and attitudes of others: one user consulted an RCMP officer on whether he thought it was safe for her to frequent the park by herself and when he said yes, she felt more comfortable using the park; others heeded to warnings from neighbours or friends regarding stories of coyotes, myths about the 2009 murder, and some simply saying “do not enter the park alone”.

As a result, many participants believed that they would be safer entering the park with a companion and several said they would rarely enter alone. One user sought out walking partners through organizations, another felt more secure with her dog with her, and others made a habit of going with friends or family. Though some wanted a companion there to scare off potential offenders or to help if something happened such as a sprained ankle or a spooking of their horse, not all users selected companions to help them feel safe – many simply perceived the park as an opportunity to spend time with people they enjoyed being with.

“I think it’s more fun if I walk in [the park], but I always choose to walk along the outside instead. I went into the park in the summertime with a group of friends...it was fun in there. But I just feel a little bit afraid to walk on my own.”

– *Research Participant #10 (2011)*

“I enjoy the socializing. Because I work at home by myself, I find it really important to socialize with people, so if I can multi-task and get exercise at the same time for an hour, that’s the highlight of my day.”

– *Research Participant #8 (2011)*

“When I go out, I do occasionally go out by myself, but I prefer to go out with at least one other person, just for the danger factor. You know if something happens to your horse or or if you fall off, you’d like to have someone there”

– *Research Participant #2 (2011)*

**Commentary on Effects on Park Use:**

These details, shared by a number of park users, illustrate that the way they perceive the park and their personal safety has real effects on *how* they use and experience the park, not just *if* they use it. To enhance their experiences in the park, their values and concerns regarding the park were investigated and applied to their self-generated recommendations.



## 4.3 Terrain and Physical Environment

Comments about trail conditions, subsurface, trees and other natural elements of the park were categorized under the theme of Terrain and Physical Environment. Specifically, runaway horses, uneven footing, and mud-heavy trails were discussed.

Table 1. Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “terrain and physical environment” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

Concerns	Values	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Horses may get spooked by something and run off</li><li>• Rocky footing on Clinton Hill is challenging for horses</li><li>• Bumpy areas and lack of connectivity on sidewalks on the perimeter of park: e.g. Blanca Street</li><li>• Muddy trails are hazardous for those on foot</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flat areas and woodchip surfaces are good for running/walking on<sup>2</sup></li><li>• The mature forest in the Salish/Imperial/Council area is nice for equestrians because the forest is more open allowing for better views and less surprises that may spook the horses</li><li>• Preference for the natural atmosphere and wilderness in the park was a theme among most participants</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Insert a gate at SW Marine Drive to slow/stop runaway horses that have been spooked and are attempting to run back to Southlands</li><li>• Insert a sidewalk at Blanca Street and maintain all perimeter sidewalks to provide better footing on park outskirts</li><li>• Put stepping stones on particularly muddy sections of the trails</li></ul>

### 4.3.1 Runaway Horses

One suggestion came from an equestrian who was concerned about horses getting spooked by something and galloping back to the Southlands neighbourhood<sup>3</sup>. He explained that horses can get spooked for a number of reasons which could include anything from an aggressive dog to a twig cracking in the woods, causing them to startle and return home<sup>4</sup>. This participant preferred riding in more

<sup>2</sup> Wood chips blend well with most natural surroundings and are quiet and comfortable to walk on. They are not firm enough for bicycle or special needs trails, and scatter too easily for equestrian trails.

Source: British Columbia State Park Trail and Design Construction Standards Manual (<http://www.trailstobuild.com/Articles/BC%20Trail%20Standards/7-5.htm>)

<sup>3</sup> Southlands is the neighbourhood southeast of Pacific Spirit Regional Park where several stables and horseback riding clubs are located in Vancouver, BC.

<sup>4</sup> Flight, an escape response, was probably the horse's principle defence in ancient days when it had the role of being prey to carnivorous predators. Source: Fraser, A.F. (2010) *The Behaviour and Welfare of the Horse* Pg 79.

mature sections of the forest because as the trees grow, foliage is concentrated at the canopy rather than at eye level, allowing for better visual access to their surroundings. He claimed that, as a result, the horse was less likely to be startled by anything in its surroundings and reducing the chances of it running off. This participant valued the natural state of the park and did not wish to see clearing or manicuring of the forest; he instead suggested that, in addition to using extra caution in secondary growth areas, erecting a gate to slow or stop runaway horses would ease concerns for the horses' safety and for traffic safety. This gate, he suggested, would be most useful at the park entrance closest to Southlands where most of the stables are – the South West Marine Drive Entrance. The participants in the focus group did not disagree with the implementation of a gate, rather they discussed how it could fit in with the feel of the park (e.g. be made of natural materials) and have a pedestrian entrance large enough for people pushing strollers. An example of the type of gates and fences currently in the park is illustrated in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Pedestrian-only gate in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

#### **Commentary on Runaway Horses:**

Just as humans feel more vulnerable when visibility is reduced, animals respond strongly to enclosure and they become more alert to potential threats and aware of escape routes (Blobsaum and Hunecke, 2005; Stamps, 2005), thus they are more likely to become spooked by an unexpected noise on a densely vegetated trail, than on an open trail or a trail in a mature forest, as the participant mentioned.

Runaway horses are a safety threat to their riders, other Pacific Spirit Regional Park users, vehicle drivers on Southwest Marine Drive, and to the horses themselves. Being aware of what types of trails induce nervousness or calmness in horses is useful for managers and planners when designing and designating horse-permitted trails. Understanding these behavioural responses by animals to perceived threats, can

help decision makers understand the need to stop or slow horses and appropriate locations for implementing such measures.

### 4.3.2 Uneven Footing

One park user, who was particularly intimidated by entering the park's forest (which she described as tall, dark, and creepy), enjoyed getting her exercise by jogging on the more open sidewalk areas adjacent to the park edge.

A concern she had about using the park edge, however, was the unevenness of some stretches of the sidewalk on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, causing her to slow to a walking pace so that she would not get hurt. This user suggested repairing the sidewalks to allow for safer footing and, for the same reason, ensuring that the sidewalks are continuous by extending the sidewalk along Blanca Street (between University Boulevard and 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue) would improve jogging conditions and permit joggers in the area to enjoy the scenery rather than worrying about her footing.

“Sometimes I want to run, but with the bumpy road it’s really hard for you to run. I don’t know why there’s such a big difference between these sections.”

– Research Participant #10 (2011)

When this suggestion was raised at the focus group, participants were amenable to upgrading the park's *exterior* but wanted to clarify that these paved sidewalks were not welcome in the *interior* of the park. A couple of participants had highlighted in their interviews that they preferred to go to the park because the woodchip surfaces were especially good for walking and jogging and members of the focus group stressed the importance of keeping the park as natural (i.e. unpaved) as possible, contributing to the treasured 'wilderness' atmosphere of the park.



Figure 6. Sidewalk at University Boulevard and Blanca Street, Vancouver, BC. *Google Maps Streetview.*



### **Commentary on Uneven Footing:**

In addition to the uneven footing mentioned by a participant in this study, previous studies have found that pot holes and rotten overhead branches are hazardous terrain concerns found in other parks. Parks are valued as places to recreate (Gies, 2006) but hazardous terrain causes park users to use these areas with caution or to seek other locations to recreate in response to their fear of personal injury (Harnik, 2006). To strengthen the physical benefits of parks, it is important to ensure that they are well-maintained.

Most participants said that they thought Pacific Spirit Regional Park upkeep was good. In reality, the sidewalk bordering the park is City of Vancouver jurisdiction, not the responsibility of Metro Vancouver Regional Parks; moreover, a large portion of the area in question borders the University Golf Course, not Pacific Spirit Regional Park. However, despite this area not being the responsibility of Metro Vancouver Regional Parks, many community members have to use these sidewalks to reach the park. Promoting safety for those trying to reach the park as well as having a well-maintained perimeter that reflects the quality of the park's interior could be in the interest of Pacific Spirit Regional Park staff.

### **4.3.3 Mud-Heavy Trails**

Particularly muddy areas of park were cited as a park drawback for a user who enjoyed jogging through Pacific Spirit Regional Park. Participants agreed that placing stepping stones in these areas would help to keep people out of the mud as well as prevent people from trampling the adjoining forest floor to avoid getting their shoes muddied. While the stones would provide a means of avoiding the mud, some participants pointed out the mud would still be present, contributing to the atmosphere of being in a natural setting; participants agreed that they valued the sense of naturalness in the park.



Figure 7. Mud-heavy trail in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

### **Commentary on Mud-Heavy Trails:**

Mud-heavy areas require people to use the trail with caution for fear of personal injury and have the same potential consequences as uneven footing does. The difference is that mud is seasonal, or weather-dependent.

#### **4.3.4 Summary:**

In the focus group, participants were in agreement with the concerns presented. Though they did not oppose the physical implementation of the recommendations, group members made clear that the *way* they would be implemented – design, type, etc. – would influence their level of support for the suggested alteration. Participants who had been using the park for several years voiced concerns that alterations such as changing the trail substrate were not welcome if they affected the character and natural feel of the park. In their discussion, the group sought low-impact solutions to the concerns, arriving upon recommendations for a horse gate made of natural materials, stressing that they did not want sidewalks *inside* the park, and suggesting the placement of stepping stones rather than covering muddy areas over completely.

Recommendations:

1. Install gate at SW Marine Drive that will *a)* stop or slow runaway horses which have been spooked, *b)* still allow passage of people with wheelchairs or strollers, and *c)* be designed to fit the character of the park.
2. Advocate that the City of Vancouver repair the sidewalks along 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue adjacent to the park and connect the sidewalks from University Boulevard to 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue along Blanca Street to improve footing surrounding the Pacific Spirit Regional Park and to continue to use natural materials *only* on interior park trails to maintain the natural feel of the park.
3. Place stepping stones in particularly muddy areas of the park trails for better footing and to maintain the natural feel of the park.
4. Consider low-impact options that fit with the park's natural character when considering alterations to the physical environment as this is strongly valued by some park users.

## 4.4 Accessibility

Comments about the ease and accessibility of using the park and its trails were categorized under the theme of Accessibility. Specifically, toilet facilities, trail designations, and trail signage were discussed.

Table 2. Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “accessibility” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

Concerns	Values	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On- and off-leash trails are complicated to follow: path designations seem arbitrary and would prefer something more continuous.</li><li>• Short-loop option is not available for people who wish to go for a walk with small children.</li><li>• Tall, dark forest are intimidating and creepy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoy that it is a park with multipurpose uses: areas for horses, off-leash dog areas, on-leash dog areas.</li><li>• Bathroom at 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue is very useful.</li><li>• Can commute through the forest to UBC.</li><li>• Consider the park an “extended backyard”.</li><li>• Northern portion of park offers nice views and a variety of spaces.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide another toilet facility in the park: 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue or mid-park would be good locations.</li><li>• Increase connectivity of off-leash trails.</li><li>• Create smaller loops to allow people with young children to take shorter walks; could be useful near Acadia Park (UBC) and the elementary schools.</li><li>• Update signage and maps to be clearer and more readable.</li></ul>

### 4.4.1 Toilet Facilities

Some interviewees noted the value in being able to commute through the park to school/work and to have this recreational area so close-by. To add to the ease and accessibility of using Pacific Spirit Regional Park on a regular basis, one park user proposed another toilet facility be constructed. This user pointed out that, because the large forested portion of the park was so extensive, it was not adequate to have toilets solely located along the park’s perimeter. She suggested that locating a toilet facility at the intersection of 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Imperial Road or elsewhere “mid-park” would relieve some anxieties she had using the park. In the focus group, participants were not opposed to introducing a second washroom in the large, forested portion of the park.

“Sometimes I like to take the trail that goes up to 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue because there’s a bathroom there. It would be nice to have another bathroom, something maybe at 29<sup>th</sup> or somewhere in the middle, because that is a slight issue sometimes. And I’m not the only middle age woman that feels that way. I’d say there are lots of people that would like that.”

– Research Participant #9 (2011)



Figure 8. Toilet facility located at 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

#### **Commentary on Toilet Facilities:**

Currently, Metro Vancouver Regional Parks is in the concept design phase for toilet facilities at Wreck Beach which involves an extensive public process (Harding, 2012). One participant, who was an activist for Wreck Beach, was in strong opposition to implementing permanent facilities at the beach and the proposed design of the facilities. This user enjoyed the “illusion of nature” found at the beach and felt that man-made facilities would detract from that experience. She was unable to attend the focus group, but her concerns over the design of the facilities at the beach could be applicable to park users regarding implementing facilities in the interior of the forested park area. The strong opposition expressed by a participant for the proposed Wreck Beach facilities, highlights the need for public consultation in constructing new facilities in the park and the importance of low-impact design.

Locating the facilities at the intersection of 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Imperial Road would likely see less opposition than “mid-park” where an access road would likely need to be constructed for toilet maintenance and waste disposal.



#### 4.4.2 Trail Designation and Signage:

Other suggestions to enhance ease and accessibility included investigating how well the trail design met the needs of specific user groups. One participant commented that walking her dog off-leash was complicated as the path designations for on-leash and off-leash were difficult to follow. Another participant stated that she preferred on-leash areas because off-leash dogs made her and her children uncomfortable.

“The park seems to have arbitrarily decided that some trails are going to be on-leash and it’s hard to tell where it’s going to be. I don’t know whether you can find your way very easily through the park going on the on leash bits all the time. It would be quite tricky.

– Research Participant #6 (2011)

Another user commented that as a parent of young children, he would like to see smaller loops that were more manageable for family outings; he suggested that these could be designed for areas where the surrounding neighbourhood has a lot of young children such as the family housing on UBC campus and the elementary schools adjacent to the park. Taking into account that some people feel uncomfortable in forest settings, this user also suggested that smaller loops are useful for newcomers and more timid users in that it could build their comfort and familiarity within the park. Another participant commented that it was easy to get lost in the park. Participants in the focus group suggested that implementing clear “you are here” maps and displaying the distances of trails and loops on signposts would be encouraging to Pacific Spirit Regional Park users wishing to venture further into the park.



Figure 9. Trail signage at Sherry Sakamoto Trail and Top Trail in Pacific Spirit Regional Park.



### **Commentary on Trail Designation and Signage:**

Due to participants confusion about the trail designations appropriate signage should be clearly provided and the connectivity and ability to walk through the park on on-leash-only trails should be reviewed by the park's planners.

Currently there is map signage along some of the trails in Pacific Spirit Regional Park, but the participants of this study were unaware of them so it would appear that more maps or clearer signs are needed. Including distances of trails could also help the park's users to feel confident about choosing which trail to take. These suggestions are useful in the consideration of the comprehensive updating and sign replacement plan for Pacific Spirit Regional Park which is scheduled to commence April 2012 and to be completed by the end of the year (Harding, 2012).

The comment that the park was tall, dark, intimidating, and creepy, may have been a product of the participant's personal context, as she had recently moved to Vancouver from a highly urban Asian mega-city and previous research has shown that people who are not as familiar with natural settings or who have higher anxiety tend to feel less comfortable in wild park settings and more comfortable in manicured park settings (Bixler et al., 1994).

"In China we don't have forests in the city, only parks which are composed of manicured lawns, grass, small trees and bushes. You are not exposed to those high trees and forests.... in China it's so busy and populated, you see people everywhere. But when I suddenly go to an environment that is all nature, I become afraid of being by myself."

*– Research Participant #10 (2011)*

### **4.4.3 Summary:**

In the one-on-one interviews one participant advocated for the implementation of a toilet facility in Pacific Spirit Regional Park's forested interior, while another advocated against such facilities at Wreck Beach. The Wreck Beach advocate was not present at the focus group where all participants were amenable to the proposal for facilities in the forested interior. Whether some park users strongly oppose this proposal (just as the Wreck Beach user opposes the proposal for the beach facilities) or if these attitudes differ with the different landscape contexts of the beach and forest should be further explored. Planners should also seek facility designs that are appropriate for the landscape context and character.

For better ease of access and to encourage confidence in park users, clear signage and ample information should be posted along the trails and the connectivity of trail designations should be logical.

Under the theme of "accessibility", is notable that the British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society rents a trailer at the Pacific Spirit Regional Park Centre on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Their mandate is to bring people

with significant disabilities into contact with nature and non-urban environments and they operate multi-terrain wheelchairs<sup>5</sup>. Though none of the participants in this study identified themselves as having significant disabilities, further research should be conducted regarding accessibility for people who have wheelchairs, strollers, and who face other mobility challenges.

Recommendations:

1. Consult Pacific Spirit Regional Park users on the implementation a toilet facility in the park's forested interior and seek appropriate designs and locations.
2. Investigate how well trail design meets the needs of specific user groups: off leash connectivity, on leash connectivity, and smaller trail loops for family-heavy areas.
3. Upgrade signage to include trail distances and clear maps.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: BC Mobility Opportunities Society Website <http://www.bcmos.org/main/index.php>

## 4.5 People in the Park

Comments about nervousness of being alone in the park, preferring the company of others, and increasing use of the park were categorized under the theme of People in the Park. Specifically, creating destinations and providing a means of accessing various park user groups were discussed.

Table 3. Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “people in the park” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

Concerns	Values	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many users made reference to media reports and rumours surrounding the murder that occurred April 2009.</li> <li>• Concerns associated with this included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervousness when alone.</li> <li>- Thoughts of the murder detracting from users’ enjoyment of the park.</li> <li>- Concern for solitary women in the park.</li> <li>- Suspicion of meeting dangerous people in the park.</li> <li>- Personal safety insecurities resulting from warnings from friends not to go in the park alone.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of being away from the city.</li> <li>• Uncrowded and relatively undeveloped.</li> <li>• A place for relaxation.</li> <li>• Enjoy seeing families and kids.</li> <li>• Social aspect of routinely going with friends, meeting new people, bringing visitors.</li> <li>• Sharing the experience with friends, partners, kids, visitors from away.</li> <li>• Some prefer the busier areas (e.g. “safety in numbers”) and others prefer the sense of spirituality associated with being alone in nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring more families into the park as they help users feel at ease.</li> <li>• Provide destinations such as places to rest as children play; mark these on the map.</li> <li>• Provide facilities for children to play – even if it’s just a small wooden house.</li> <li>• Organize and promote tours to build park familiarity for newcomers: events, bike tours, walking tours showcasing key areas of the park, etc.</li> <li>• Organize walking partners or walking groups.</li> </ul>

One of the most prominent safety concerns identified by participants in this study was the fear of meeting ill-intentioned people in the Pacific Spirit Regional Park. In the one-on-one interviews, many participants made reference to the murder of Wendy Ladner-Beaudry, citing the extensive media coverage at the time of the murder in 2009 as well as rumours and warnings they have received from peers since then. These concerns manifested themselves in some participants as nervousness of being alone, thoughts of the murder detracting from users’ enjoyment in the park, concern for women who are alone in the park, suspicion of meeting dangerous people in the park, and warnings resonating in their heads when using the park. Several participants said that they resented having these feelings and were determined to overcome these fears.

“For a while after the Wendy Ladner Incident, I resented that I was walking in the park with a fear that I hadn’t had before and I did not want the beauty of that forest to be marred. So I just worked on telling myself that I wasn’t going to let that spoil things.”

– Research Participant #8 (2011)

A common suggestion to assist in overcoming these fears and raising perceived safety was to bring more people into the park. One participant stated that she believed in the phrase “safety in numbers”, one preferred to stay on the more populated trails, and others suggested that more people around would discourage criminal activity as well as provide help and assistance if needed.

Suggestions for bringing more people into the Pacific Spirit Regional Park originated from both the specific desire of enhancing feelings of safety as well from more general personal interest ideas that consequently would attract more park users. In the focus group, participants stated that although attracting people may make people feel safer and allow people who are uncomfortable to use the park for recreational purposes, it may also increase maintenance costs and, more importantly, diminish the illusion of wilderness which is a highlight for so many of the current park users.

Previous studies also found that promoting heavier park use is very effective in improving both actual and perceived safety (Thomas, 2007), stating that being in solitude tends to reduce one’s sense of safety (Hilborn, 2009). In conditions of elevated fear, people felt more at ease in the company of others and were more likely to use parks in a group rather than individually (Madge, 1996). Hilborn (2009) explained that increasing people in the park discourages antisocial activities and re-establishes natural guardianship which lessens crime and enhances security.

Though participants in this study were careful to state that the design of any new infrastructure must not detract from the naturalness of the park, a couple of participants also voiced concerns that the *presence* of more people would also reduce the sense of being in the wilderness – this was noted as a reoccurring theme. That participants considered the impact of recommendations on their other values (i.e. value of nature) and in the context of possible financial constraints, reaffirms that community input can be contributed in meaningful ways and with a broader understanding of the issues.

#### **4.5.1 Destinations**

Suggestions that arose from the one-on-one interviews included finding more ways to bring families into the park such as by creating special areas like the boardwalk /educational signage in Camosun Bog and by providing facilities for children to play that could be as little as a small wooden house to spark interest. Another user highlighted that if there were more destinations to induce people to enter the park, it would be more appealing to people who like to have a specific goal in mind for their visits; she suggested that benches to rest while children play, areas good for berry picking, etc. could be marked on the park map to give visitors a purpose for their walk.

“We quite enjoy playing, having a walk, or having a rest around green areas; but the thing is, we’re just focused on whether my child can have more fun. Let’s not forget that we are parents, so we must think differently. “

*- Research Participant #3 (2011)*

In the focus group, some park users felt a sense of protection over the current ‘undeveloped’ nature of the park which, again, spoke to many park users' high regard for the naturalness of the park. They discussed once more how these ideas could be implemented in a low impact way and suggested that if there were to be further developments to do these in already developed areas and to keep the other areas unchanged. For example, if a picnic table is desired then the Plains of Abraham, an already cleared portion of the park, would be a better and more acceptable option for the bench than clearing a spot in the woods for one.

### **Commentary on Destinations:**

Designing the park in a way that attracts many different users and accommodates a range of activities and interests can allow for heavier usage (Thomas, 2007; Hilborn, 2009). Studies suggest that to achieve this, the park should appeal to everyone –elderly, people with special needs, youth- through activities and programs (Thomas, 2007; Wolch et al., 2010) and activity generators (Hilborn, 2009). Indicating where specific “destinations” such as salmon berry picking areas, fish habitat, picnic tables and interactive boardwalks are located can help attract a variety of people to the park.

Like the participants, Hilborn (2009) acknowledged the need for balance and the impact that promoting heavier park use could have on the ‘naturalness’ of the park’s interior. He suggested designing activity generators to be on the perimeters of the park to attract activity and contribute to surveillance of the park from the street (Hilborn, 2009). The participant’s suggestion to locate any infrastructure in already developed or cleared portions of the park is another way to protect this sense of ‘naturalness’.

## **4.5.2 Groups**

Another suggestion was to organize and promote tours to build park familiarity for newcomers through events, bike tours, walking tours, etc and to organize walking partners or walking groups. Several participants stated that they enjoyed visiting the park with activity partners, loved ones and visitors. One woman said she sought out walking partners through an organization<sup>6</sup>. Reasons given for visiting the park in the company of others included:

- bonding,
- enjoyment of others’ company,
- feeling safer with other people with them,

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<sup>6</sup> This user used meetup.com to find walking partners. Meetup is an online portal that allows members to find and join local groups around the world, unified by a common interest.

- having someone there in case they needed assistance with something,
- and combinations of several social and security benefits.

Participants in the focus group were in support of this low-impact suggestion of encouraging people to attend the park in groups. They acknowledged that walking and running groups already exist in the park, but said many users are unsure of how to find or join such groups; providing a link that lists the different groups that use the park and subsequent links to the groups' personal websites would be useful to have on the Pacific Spirit Regional Park website. They suggested advertising this idea through local newspapers such as the *Courier* and the Pacific Spirit Regional Park brochure or newsletter so that *a)* groups know where they can post their information and gain recruitment and *b)* park users have a centralized place to find companions and join groups.



Figure 10. “Walk for Health” in Pacific Spirit Regional Park, hosted by the Green Club, a Chinese environmental organization in Vancouver, BC. *Photo: [www.greenclub.bc.ca](http://www.greenclub.bc.ca).*

### **Commentary on Groups:**

One of the most active groups in the park is the Pacific Spirit Park Society and on its website under “Safety Tips”<sup>7</sup>, 13 safety tips for walking and jogging are listed; the second tip on the list was “Walk or Jog with a Companion”.

Though there are a number of organized groups who use the park, scheduled events, and regular park tours (offered by both the Pacific Spirit Park Society and by Metro Vancouver Park interpreters), not all participants were aware of these opportunities; some expressed the desire to have a centralized website to view such information. Currently, the official webpage for Pacific Spirit Regional Park lists the following under ‘Park Partnerships’:

<sup>7</sup> Source: [http://www.pacificspiritparksociety.org/About\\_PSRP/safety\\_tips.html](http://www.pacificspiritparksociety.org/About_PSRP/safety_tips.html)

“Pacific Spirit Park Society is actively involved in Pacific Spirit Regional Park. For more information or to get involved with this association, contact the Community Development Coordinator at the West Area Parks Office at 604-224-5739 or go to the Park Partnership Program website (external website). “

*- Pacific Spirit Regional Park Official Web Page (2012)*

The external website also directs users to the Pacific Spirit Park Society as well as the Wreck Beach Preservation Society and has newsletters where some information about other groups can be found within their articles.

### **4.5.3 Summary:**

Bringing more people into the park is generally low-cost as well as low-impact on the physical environment given its size and current levels of use but can still have effects on the sense of wilderness valued by many of this study’s participants. Finding a balance is necessary.

Some Pacific Spirit Regional Park aspects desired by participants already exist but the information is not readily available. Clearly marking points of interest (or ‘destination’ points) on park maps can remind community members of reasons to enter the park or to explore new areas of the park. Providing a centralized online space for community members to learn about tours, events, and user groups within Pacific Spirit Regional Park would assist individuals looking for companionship in the park.

Recommendations:

1. Investigate ways to *a)* attract more people to the park, and *b)* provide companionship for park visitors.
2. Provide special destinations for families and other park users to provide purpose and interest in visiting the park. Mark these on the map and do them in low-impact ways that do not detract from the natural character of the park. Current destinations include the Plains of Abraham, wooden house, berry picking, salmon spawning, etc..
3. Create an online reference site for people to find tours, events, and interest groups that use the park.



## 4.6 Park Watch

Comments about the desire to have personnel watch over the park and provide assistance when needed were categorized under the theme of Park Watch. Specifically, information availability, an on-site office, and community stewards were discussed.

Table 4. Concerns, values and recommendations regarding “park watch” stated in one-on-one interviews with Pacific Spirit Regional Park users.

Concerns	Values	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dislike seeing litter, people trampling environmentally sensitive areas, and demonstrating a disregard for the environment.</li><li>• Worried about injuring self in the park and not having access to help nearby.</li><li>• Fear of meeting bad people and having nowhere to report suspicious people/things.</li><li>• No one enforcing the leashing of dogs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoy that the park is relatively undeveloped.</li><li>• Enjoy feelings of spirituality, freedom, and relaxation at the park.</li><li>• Sense of community.</li><li>• Naturalness and sense of wilderness in the park.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide information regarding when and how often park rangers come through the park.</li><li>• Build an on-site office: a place to report things to and a central spot where there is a quick on-hand response if there is an emergency.</li><li>• Implement volunteer watch group to watch over the park.</li></ul>

Many participants felt that concerns regarding environmental irresponsibility, perceived lack of assistance available in the case of injury, threat of suspicious or ill-intentioned people in the park, and unenforced leashing of dogs could be relieved by increasing guardianship in the park. This included having more information about who to turn to, knowing where to find them, and ensuring that people patrolled the park.

Formal surveillance and active techniques that promote park personnel and policing presence can significantly enhance park users’ sense of security in these settings (Hilborn, 2009). Signs of human presence, both in their physical presence and through upkeep of park maintenance, can give the impression that the park is cared for and watched over, contributing to users’ perceived safety of the area (Thomas, 2007). Without such signs, both users and potential offenders are given the sense that no one is in charge of the park (Hilborn, 2009).

In addition to enhancing users’ perceived safety, park personnel can maintain rules and regulations that are in place to enhance users’ enjoyment of the park.

### 4.6.1 Information Availability

One interviewee who enjoyed jogging in the park suggested that having more information on when park personnel passed through the park would help her plan what to do if she would ever be injured while running. She said that knowing someone would be coming through would help alleviate some of her fears in this regard. The same user said that if she saw someone or something suspicious, she would need to know whom to report it to.

“Do the Rangers ever patrol the trails? It would be good to have little signs that say when the trails are monitored so when you’re in the park and you sprain your ankle or get lost, then someone will come to find you eventually. You know, just to know that there’s somebody that’s coming through. If that were the case, I’d even be running alone in there. ”

*- Research Participant #1 (2011)*

When this was discussed at the focus group, participants were not aware of scheduled patrols. One participant said that he had never seen any park personnel in the park, one said she had seen them on a few occasions and another asked if the trailers located on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue were onsite park offices (which they are not). All agreed that it would be helpful to be given more information.



Figure 11. Information boards are located at major entrances to Pacific Spirit Regional Park.

#### **Commentary on Information Availability:**

The current system for reporting hazards in Pacific Spirit Regional Park is to approach park personnel on the trails, phone the office, or email staff. In the busier seasons of spring and summer, park personnel

are in the park daily and cover each trail a minimum of twice a week, and three to four times a week for most trails (Wallis, 2011). Park personnel are often in a vehicle at night and on foot during the day, though they sometimes travel by bike (Wallis, 2011).

If patrols do not follow a regular schedule, posting information is ineffective. Staff should therefore ensure that the phone number for Pacific Spirit Regional Park users to report issues is clearly marked on all signage within the park.

#### **4.6.2 On-Site Office**

If unlikely to meet park personnel in the park, one park user suggested that an onsite office would be beneficial as it could act as a place for users to report things (for those who did not bring cell phones) and could provide quick on-hand response to an emergency. She gave examples of spraining an ankle or seeing unusual activity in the woods.

A member of the focus group offered that building a new office was a big undertaking and probably very expensive. He suggested that the recommendations for volunteer patrols might be a more practical solution.

##### **Commentary on an On-Site Office:**

The Park Centre, located at 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Cleveland Trail currently consists of three trailers designated to Catching the Spirit Youth Society, British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society, and Pacific Spirit Regional Park Operations use as well as some toilet facilities (Wallis, 2011). The Acting Area Manager for Pacific Spirit Regional Park said replacing the Park Centre with an office is a possibility.

“There has been some discussion of replacing the Park Centre at 16<sup>th</sup> and Cleveland. If that ever happens it would be a significant development. The current thinking is that it would be for the same site because it works well from a lot of perspectives: utilities, access, central. That’s still on the 5 year horizon.”

*–Richard Wallis,  
Metro Vancouver Regional Parks (West Area) Acting Manager (2011)*



Figure 12. Park Centre trailers located at 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Cleveland Trail. *Google Maps Streetview*.

### 4.6.3 Community Stewards

The subject of park personnel patrolling the park was brought up by numerous park users in the one-on-one interviews as an immediate way to enhance users' perceptions of safety in the park. One user said that patrols "send the message that there is enforcement present and that there are people looking out for your safety". Again, the focus group considered park resource limitations and the financial implications of such suggestions which led them to explore the viability of citizen-run patrols such as BlockWatch<sup>8</sup>.

A participant suggested that the neighbouring community of Dunbar has a BlockWatch group which may be able to expand their territory to include parts of the park at scheduled times. Another participant mentioned that on-bike patrols could allow volunteer groups to navigate the park faster and cover more territory. Providing bikes for groups of youth volunteers was suggested as well.

"I don't see rangers on the trails very often. I think it would help other people's perceptions if someone's in the park, even if it's a volunteer with a vest on. Without question people would feel better if there were a few more people like that. Because there's not, you don't see them, it's very rare."

*—Research Participant #7 (2011)*

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<sup>8</sup> The Block Watch Program provides an opportunity for concerned citizens to watch out for their neighbours and any suspicious activity. Participants attend regular meetings where residents come together and discuss safety tips, possible criminal activity and exchange information with local police. Source: <http://www.blockwatch.com/>

### **Commentary on Community Stewards:**

Hilborn (2009) agreed that giving the impression that the park is cared for and controlled discourages offenses in these areas. Patrols – whether staff or volunteer – could be conducted on bike to cover a greater area of the park in a shorter amount of time; in doing so, patrollers would pass by more park users, delivering the message that there are people actively watching over the park.

Pairing up with volunteer groups that are already in place is a time and cost effective practice for implementing such programs, though risks and liabilities associated with using youth volunteers for safety patrols should be investigated.

### **4.6.4 Summary:**

Participants were unsure of what to do in the case of an emergency in Pacific Spirit Regional Park and of the frequency of park personnel patrols. Participants expressed a desire to be able to report concerns to park personnel and to have quick, on-hand emergency response available. An on-sight park office and more frequent park patrols were recommended. Some participants were cognisant of potential financial limitations and suggested that an increase of patrols would be sufficient if an office was too expensive and that volunteer patrols could be viable options.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Provide easily accessible information regarding how and where to contact park personnel.
2. Consider the feasibility having an onsite office for park personnel.
3. Support local groups of volunteers who may be interested in patrolling the park to assist park users in need and to report anything suspicious. Consider approaching Block Watch groups or youth groups, and consider the effectiveness of providing bikes for these patrols.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

Pacific Spirit Regional Park has a highly involved, active community, willing to share their ideas and provide critical feedback. Their commitment to bettering their community should be recognized and celebrated. This project exemplified the fruitfulness of engaging community members and can serve as a case study for future park planning processes. Metro Vancouver Regional Parks hosts a Park Partnership Program designed to develop community around regional parks, build capacity of volunteers to conduct a wide variety of stewardship activities in regional parks and facilitate those activities to completion (Harding, 2012). The continued involvement of these volunteers and of the broader community should be regarded as valuable assets when considering the recommendations put forth in report.

This report provided insights into the various ways in which community members used and perceived the park. Variations between perspectives were a product of each participant's personal context. The activities participants pursued in the park, their priorities such as environment, relaxation, and parenting, their previous experiences and backgrounds, and how strongly they were influenced by the options of others clearly affected participants' attitudes towards the park and its constituents. The way participants' attitudes changed when discussing the forested section of the park or the beach and foreshore of the park, clearly demonstrated the influence landscape context has on perceptions as well.

The participants of this study perceived Pacific Spirit Regional Park as a valuable asset to the community; most felt the park provided a combination of environmental, personal, and social benefits. Though several participants expressed safety-related concerns, the nature of the concern and how it manifested itself in their behaviours was dependant on the individual. Valued as a community asset, many participants expressed resentment towards being fearful in the park and expressed desires to overcome these fears.

Suggestions for enhancing their experiences in Pacific Spirit Regional Park were categorized into four themes: terrain and physical environment, accessibility, people in the park, and park watch. Participants of the focus group demonstrated their abilities to consider the suggestions from various perspectives and to brainstorm recommendations that would both enhance experiences and fit with the character of the park.

Although the nature of the recommendations put forth were both physical and organizational, the participants in this study emphasized their preference for changes to have minimal impact on the 'naturalness' of the park and to be fitting with the current character of the park. Participants also discussed ways in which their recommendations could be fulfilled through existing structures or organizations. By using an exploratory approach with these participants, they were able to contribute creative ideas and speak to the balance they wished to achieve. This approach provided more value in addressing the project's goals than if participant input was limited to providing preference ratings as previous studies have done.

Further research incorporating a broader array of Pacific Spirit Regional Park users would be valuable in identifying more perspectives and enrich the discussion of recommendations. Conducting such a project in close partnership with the park's staff would be beneficial for both the staff to better understand community needs and the participants to better understand the feasibility of their recommendations. However, this could reduce the informal and exploratory atmosphere which often leads to an enriched sharing of ideas. For example, if a participant reflected on their experiences picking berries in the park and were informed by staff that picking berries is prohibited, that individual may be hesitant to share other experiences and ideas.

With the success of this project, this approach may serve as an example for park planners and decision makers who seek a better understanding of community perceptions and wish to explore appropriate enhancement measures. The following section provides the full list of recommendations.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Install a gate at SW Marine Drive that will a) stop or slow runaway horses that have been spooked, b) still allow passage of people with wheelchairs or strollers, and c) be designed to fit the character of the park.
2. Advocate that the City of Vancouver repair the sidewalks along 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue adjacent to the park and connect the sidewalks from University Boulevard to 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue along Blanca Street to improve footing surrounding the Pacific Spirit Regional Park and to continue to use natural materials *only* on interior park trails to maintain the natural feel of the park.
3. Place stepping stones in particularly muddy areas of the park trails for better footing and to maintain the natural feel of the park.
4. Consider low-impact options that fit with the park's natural character when considering alterations to the physical environment as this is strongly valued by some park users.
5. Consult Pacific Spirit Regional Park users on the implementation of a toilet facility in the park's forested interior and seek appropriate designs and locations.
6. Investigate how well trail design meets the needs of specific user groups in regard to off leash connectivity, on leash connectivity, and smaller trail loops for family-heavy areas.
7. Upgrade signage to include trail distances and clear maps.
8. Investigate ways to a) attract more people to the park, and b) provide companionship for park visitors.
9. Provide special destinations for families and other park users to provide purpose and interest in visiting the park. Mark these on the map and do them in low-impact ways that do not detract from the natural character of the park. Current destinations include Plains of Abraham, wooden house, berry picking, salmon spawning, etc.
10. Create an online reference site for people to find tours, events, and interest groups that use the park.
11. Provide easily accessible information regarding how and where to contact park personnel.
12. Consider the feasibility having an onsite office for park personnel.
13. Support local groups of volunteers who may be interested in patrolling the park to assist park users in need and to report anything suspicious. Consider approaching Block Watch groups or youth groups, and consider the effectiveness of providing bikes for these patrols.



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# Appendix A: Behavioural Research Ethics Certificate of Approval

20/03/2012

<https://rise.ubc.ca/rise/Doc/D/NUVJTFOH0T64DATB1SS47CEGE3/fromString.html>



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Anthony H.J. Dorsey	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/College for Interdisciplinary Studies/Community & Regional Planning	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H10-03330
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<b>Institution</b>		<b>Site</b>
N/A		N/A
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> N/A		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> N/A		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> Exploring Community Perceptions of Pacific Spirit Park		


**CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:** January 18, 2012

<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</b>	<b>DATE APPROVED:</b> January 18, 2011	
<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Consent Forms:</b>		
Subject Consent Form	N/A	January 3, 2011
<b>Letter of Initial Contact:</b>		
Letter of Initial Contact	N/A	January 4, 2011
<b>Other Documents:</b>		
Aboriginal Research Agreement	N/A	January 4, 2011
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p><i>This study has been approved either by the full Behavioural REB or by an authorized delegated reviewer</i></p>		

<https://rise.ubc.ca/rise/Doc/D/NUVJTFOH0T64DATB1SS47CEGE3/fromString.html>

1/1

## Appendix B: Metro Vancouver Research Permit



# RESEARCH PERMIT

metro  
vancouver  
Regional Parks Department

YEAR 2010  
*for 2011*

### APPLICANT INFORMATION

First Name <u>Ellen</u>		Last Name <u>Bird</u>	
Organization: <u>University of British Columbia</u>			
Address: <u>213-500 W 10 Ave</u>			
City: <u>Vancouver</u>	Prov.: <u>BC</u>	P.C.: <u>V5Z4P1</u>	
Tel. #: <u>278-868-2224</u>		Fax #: <u>NA</u>	
Other Contact: <u>NA</u>		Contact Tel. #: <u>NA</u>	

### RESEARCH INFORMATION

Type of Research: <u>Semi-formal interviews - Park Perceptions</u>	# of Researchers: <u>1</u>
Purpose: <u>To look at how park users perceive the park and explore what they think might enhance their experiences.</u>	
Method:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Semi-formal 1-on-1 interviews w various park users</li> <li>2. Cycle back a compiled presentation of this information (from #1) in a group meeting for feed back.</li> <li>3. Write report</li> </ol>	
After-hour requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <u>Interviews are likely held in evenings, but not in Park</u>
# of days required to complete research:	<u>30</u> <del>NA</del> Date(s) of Visit: <u>NA</u> - <u>begin in January</u> <u>but not in Park.</u>

### PARK INFORMATION

Parks: Pacific Spirit Park

Specific Location: Pre-determined interview locations (not in Park itself)

### GENERAL CONDITIONS

1. Researchers must comply with Metro Vancouver (MV) Parks' rules and regulations.
2. Research must be conducted during park hours only; or comply with after-hours guidelines noted in this permit.
3. All flagging or marking materials must be inconspicuous, kept to a minimum and removed when the research is completed. If flagging tape must be used, it should be dated and initialed to ensure that it remains in place for the duration of the research.
4. A report summarizing the research and its findings will be submitted to MV Parks.
5. While conducting research, researchers will respond to inquiries from park visitors in a friendly manner so that they are informed about the research and its importance, and understand that the impacts on the park are minimal.
6. Researchers will be a resource for MV Parks in the development of educational/ interpretive programs that highlight the findings of the research.
7. Researcher safety must comply with WCB guidelines.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS

N/A

PERMIT PROCEDURES

1. A pplication must be received fourteen days prior to the date on which the research will begin.
2. Applicants must be 19 years or older. Groups must have adult supervision at all times.
3. A signed copy of this permit may be required to gain access to the research area and may be inspected by MV Parks staff and the public at any time.
4. This permit may be cancelled if:
  - a) the permit holder fails to observe, perform or keep his/her agreements under this permit;
  - b) the permit holder has willfully misrepresented information in the application process which led to the granting of this permit;
  - c) the permit area is damaged or destroyed; or
  - d) the park is closed by MV Parks.

WAIVER OF LIABILITY

In consideration of being permitted to use certain lands and premises owned by or under the control of the Metro Vancouver known as Regional Park(s) (the premises) and other good and valuable consideration, the undersigned agrees: To save harmless and indemnify the Metro Vancouver and their directors, officers, servants, employees and agents (the "Indemnified Parties") from and against all actions, claims, demands, proceedings, suits, losses, damages, costs and expenses of whatsoever kind or nature (including without limiting the generality of the foregoing, in respect of death, injury, loss or damage to any person or property) arising in any way out of or connected with the use of the Premises by the undersigned (the "Users") notwithstanding that the same may have been caused by or contributed to by the negligence of any or all of the Indemnified Parties.

I, Ellen Bird, being the duly designated representative, hereby indicate that I have read and understand the terms of this Research Permit and the Waiver of Liability as it appears above.  
Signature: [Signature] Date: December 9/10

APPROVAL

Name: Markus Merken Signature: [Signature]  
Permit Issued Date: Feb. 12 2011 Permit Expiry Date: Dec 31. 2011

Mail to: Metro Vancouver Regional Parks, West Area  
4330 Kingsway, Burnaby, B.C., V5H 4G8  
Tel: 224-5739 F ax: 224-5841  
Hand Deliver to: Metro Vancouver Regional Parks, West Area  
130 - 1200 West 73rd Ave, Vancouver, B.C.  
Tel: 224-5739 F ax: 224-5841

## Appendix C: Initial Contact Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_,

I am a Masters of Planning Student at the University of British Columbia and am currently conducting some research exploring community perceptions of Pacific Spirit Park. This study will look at what various park users prefer and avoid in the park with emphasis on perceived safety and how they envision enhancing the park to maximize their experiences in the park.

In my quest to include a variety of park users in my research, I would like to include a member of the \_\_\_\_ which is why I have contacted you. Would you or another member of the \_\_\_\_ be interested in participating in this project? Your help in participating or distributing this email is much appreciated.

The participant will take part in a casual, individual interview scheduled at his/her convenience in the upcoming couple weeks, followed by a brief feedback meeting with other participants. Each participant will be contributing to an enhanced understanding of perceptions of park use, park design and park management. A summary of the project is written below, followed by my contact information. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you, I appreciate your help and look forward to hearing from you,

Ellen Bird

## **Appendix D: Research Subject Consent Form**

### *School of Community and Regional Planning Student Research Project Consent for Participants*

#### **Research Supervisor**

Anthony Dorcey, Professor, School of Community and Regional Planning

#### **Student Researcher**

Ellen Bird, Masters of Planning Candidate, School of Community and Regional Planning

#### **The Rights of Research Participants:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca). Or you may mail:

The University of British Columbia  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
Office of Research Services  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3



## **Purpose**

Your participation is being sought in a research project being undertaken by a graduate student from the School of Community and Regional Planning at UBC. This research project is designed to explore how community members perceive Pacific Spirit Park. Few studies have looked at the relationship between public perceptions of safety and park design/management. The goal of this study to find out what is preferred and avoided in the park by various park users and how these park users envision enhancing the park to maximize their perceptions of safety in the park. Your participation will contribute to an enhanced understanding of users' perceptions related to the park and views on park design and management.

Note: This study focuses solely on *perceived* safety –the subject of *actual* safety is beyond the scope of this project. The report will be reviewed and considered by park managers, though they are *not required* to implement any recommendations that might be produced.

## **Invitation to Participate in an Interview and Group Meeting**

Your participation is being sought to take part in an interview on perceived safety in Pacific Spirit Park for various park users. The questions will focus on your personal safety preferences and hesitations in regard to how you experience the park. You are also requested to attend a feedback meeting where the various interviewees will be presented with information on the views identified from the interviews and asked to comment. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute to this study.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality means that the information you share will not be reported or used in a way that would identify you. Although we cannot guarantee anonymity because you will be present in the group meeting, your identity will not be revealed in any reports or public documents and this will help maintain public anonymity.

As a research project for completion of a Master's Degree, this report will be available in the School of Community and Regional Planning and will be presented to an audience for comment. A copy of the report will be given to Metro Vancouver Regional Parks Office for their use. Data, including transcripts and field notes, will be retained for five years after the project finishes in a locked cabinet in a department office, as required by University ethics regulations. After five years the data will be destroyed.

## **Benefits/Risks**

This research will provide important information which may help park managers better understand

users' preferences and enhance their experiences within parks. I hope you will experience the benefits of this.

Your participation will likely take approximately 3 hours. The interview (1 hour) will take place at a quiet location convenient to you. The feedback meeting (2 hours) will take place at the Dunbar Community Centre.

### **Consent**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview or your participation while it is in process.

If you choose to withdraw later, I can stop utilizing the materials you contributed, but I may be at a stage of report writing and analysis where it is impossible to separate our learning from you from the collective learning.

Any further questions may be directed to the contacts provided on the cover sheet.

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(Participant)

Date

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(Student Researcher)

Date