

**TO:** CITY MANAGER 2004 March 31  
**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING OUR FILE: PA-11-GP-01  
**SUBJECT:** ACQUISITION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS  
 BURNABY FRASER FORESHORE PARK  
**PURPOSE:** To advise Council of the conclusion of a City acquisition of lands on the Fraser River foreshore for inclusion within the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park system.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Environment Committee and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission for information purposes.

**REPORT**

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

On 1997 July 21, Council authorized staff to enter into negotiations with Canada Lands Company Ltd. (CLC) to expand the area of the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park through the acquisition of a 26 acre parcel adjacent to the Fraser River at 8357 Wheaton Street, Burnaby. On 2001 August 7, Council further authorized staff to negotiate with Canada Lands Company Ltd. for the acquisition of an additional contiguous area of 16.4 acres located at 4750 Riverbend Drive (formerly Thorn Street), Burnaby.

The proposed acquisition was based on the significant role that the subject lands have in supporting and enhancing the ecological and public park functions of the adjacent Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park lands. The subject acquisition area is shown in context with the existing adjacent Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park lands on *Figure 1, attached*.

On 2004 March 8, Council approved the acquisition of the subject lands (42.4 acres), and as of 2004 March 26, these environmentally significant lands have been transferred into City ownership for park and conservation purposes.

This report outlines the results of the negotiation concluded with the Canada Lands Company Ltd. for the \$5.28 million acquisition of the subject properties by the City, describes the environmental values of the property, and highlights next steps for the incorporation of the property into the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park system for environmental protection and public access and enjoyment through the developing trail system within the Big Bend area.

## 2.0 BURNABY PARK AND ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS INITIATIVES

The City has an extensive, diverse and enviable range of parks and open spaces which have provided for the protection and conservation of natural landscapes in the City. Park acquisition and conservation has been a cornerstone of City planning and development, with over 5,400 acres (almost 25%) of the City land base now protected as park. These parks represent the key ecosystems within the City, including watercourses and ravines, wetlands and lakes, bog areas, forests, and coastal and estuarine foreshore, and include both core habitat areas, and connecting ecological corridors.

In addition to acquiring lands, the City has worked diligently with stewardship groups, landowners, and other government agencies to protect and enhance ecological features and functions both within and outside of park areas. These programs have included extensive public education and awareness projects, initiatives to prevent pollution from entering watercourses and natural areas, protection of streamside vegetation, environmental restoration of previously degraded lands, and environmental monitoring and scientific study.

The City also participates in integrated, regional-scale environmental planning, and is an active partner in programs such as the ongoing Greater Vancouver Regional District Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, Fraser River Estuary Management Program, and Burrard Inlet Environmental Action Plan. In summary, the initiatives outlined above reflect the City's commitment to a balanced, sustainable, and ecologically responsible approach to planning and development for which it has received numerous awards. This key acquisition by the City on the Fraser River furthers the City's already considerable commitment to the environment.

## 3.0 BURNABY FRASER FORESHORE PARK

### *Existing Park Lands*

Within the Big Bend Development Plan area, the City has protected over 400 acres of land for park purposes. Prior to the subject acquisition, through implementation of the Big Bend Development Plan and related initiatives, the City had acquired title to approximately 60% of the foreshore along the North Arm of the Fraser River. The 40 acre riverside parcel (*Site A on Figure 2, attached*) acquired from the Canadian National Railway Company in 1991 has become a major component of the Burnaby Foreshore Park system for appreciation of natural habitats and passive recreational use. With this 1991 acquisition, the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park encompassed an area of 135 acres. In 1994, the City, together with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), embarked on a three year program to re-establish rearing habitat for salmon as well as to enhance the natural landscape to maximize wildlife values of these lands.

The enhancement program involved the creation of tidal wetland and marsh areas on the west side of the park, and the creation of additional tidal marshes and channels on the east side of the park. The central area was improved to create a meadow habitat for birds of prey. Park improvements not only enhanced the fisheries and wildlife habitats, but also provided for trail networks and observation points to allow for structured opportunities for nature interpretation and public awareness of the habitat resource present in the park.

***Subject Acquisition***

The subject 42.4 acre acquisition area is contiguous with the adjacent portion of the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park lands. This acquisition makes an ecologically significant contribution to the legacy embodied in the public ownership of lands within the Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park system. With this acquisition, the City will have over 175 acres of land along the Fraser River in public ownership representing 70% (5 km) of the Burnaby foreshore along the North Arm of the Fraser River. To the east of the subject property, as part of the development approval process for Glenwood Industrial Estates and property at 5600 Riverbend Drive, the City secured public access along the Fraser River within statutory rights-of-way from these private property holdings. The remaining foreshore properties within the eastern section of the Big Bend are expected to remain in private ownership, and as feasible, the City will continue to seek public access to the foreshore of these properties as part of any future redevelopment applications.

***Environmental Values***

The subject site is within the natural Fraser River flood plain and subject to periodic inundation. The lands are characterized by a variety of wetlands of various subtypes, the most significant of which is a wet meadow area located diagonally across the central portion of the site. The wet meadow is subject to regular tidal changes in water levels. The meadow area is classified as a *Tidal Freshwater Marsh* as it is subject to daily tidal inundation. This wet grassland type is a relatively rare habitat type in Burnaby and the surrounding region. Since European settlement, 75% of the wetlands in the Lower Mainland have been lost, with remaining areas isolated in small parcels. Wetlands are one of the most biologically diverse ecosystem types, and are an important component of the Pacific flyway for migrating birds. They also play a role in removing contaminants from waterways.

The wet grassland type is a primary breeding habitat for a variety of bird species, some of which have been in decline in the Lower Mainland, especially the Northern Harrier and Short-eared Owl. The surface water in the wet meadow is of sufficient depth to deter most natural ground predators, such as foxes and coyotes. As such, it provides a refuge for ground

nesting birds that is not available in the dryland grass area of the adjacent Park. As well, the hardhack-willow clumps and shrub growth surrounding the meadow provide ideal nesting habitat for Common Yellowthroats, Willow Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler and MacGillivray's Warbler, all of which benefit from the reduced disturbance from humans and natural predators provided by the wetness of the meadow. The juxtaposition of the open meadow and the adjacent woodland also provide habitat for tree-nesting species that can use adjacent open areas for foraging. In addition, this area serves to support many species currently present in the adjacent Park by providing additional feeding and nesting habitat thereby increasing the inherent stability of the existing ecosystem.

From a biological perspective, within the context of the existing adjacent park lands, the subject acquisition brings an additional habitat area and biological community to the park that is not currently represented in the existing and proposed park areas. It adds a wet grassland meadow to an existing mix of river riparian area, dry grassland, mixed forest, shrub borders, ponds and rearing channels. These elements of the Park are particularly well represented at the margins of the wet grassland habitat, thus providing ideal opportunity for interpretative programs, within a relatively discrete area, to highlight the inter-relationship of habitat types ranging from fish habitat to nesting areas for birds and other animals. As well, it is the transition areas between the wet grassland and surrounding shrub to forest areas that produce the most biologically diverse plant and animal communities which are of considerable interest and educational value to park visitors. Finally, it is important to note that larger natural areas have greater value than smaller segmented parcels as they are more resilient to environmental impacts.

*Figure 2, attached,* summarizes some of the environmental features of the current and subject park lands.

#### 4.0 NEXT STEPS

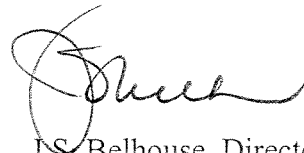
Given the quality of the ecological and environmental assets associated with these lands, the Mayor's Office previously wrote to the Federal Minister of Environment, the Provincial Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection and to the Director GVRD Parks to request a financial contribution towards the cost of the acquisition of the subject properties. At this time, staff are continuing to pursue financial contributions towards the City expenditure for this recent acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands.

The Canada Lands Company has expressed an interest in working with the City in a joint effort to extend the Urban Trail system from Tillicum Street and Fraser Park Drive through the expanded Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park lands to connect into the planned and developing Urban Trail system on Riverbend Drive and within the Glenwood Industrial Estates development. The City has a total allocation of \$550,000 within the 2004 - 2008

Provisional Capital Program for the Fraser Foreshore Urban Trail system. Planning and Parks staff would propose to work with the Canada Lands Company and GVRD Parks under the Greenway Program to leverage City capital funds to provide for the eastward extension of the Big Bend Urban Trail system through the expanded Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park lands and to develop appropriate habitat appreciation and interpretation opportunities.

As part of this work, staff would advance City rezoning of the properties to the P3 Park and Public Use District and review benefits of the subdivision consolidation of the two new parcels and appropriate road closure areas to prepare the properties for future park dedication.

It is recommended that a copy of this report be forwarded to the Environment Committee and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission for information purposes.



J.S. Belhouse, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

LP/jc  
Attachments (2)

cc: Director Finance  
Director Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services  
Director Engineering  
City Solicitor

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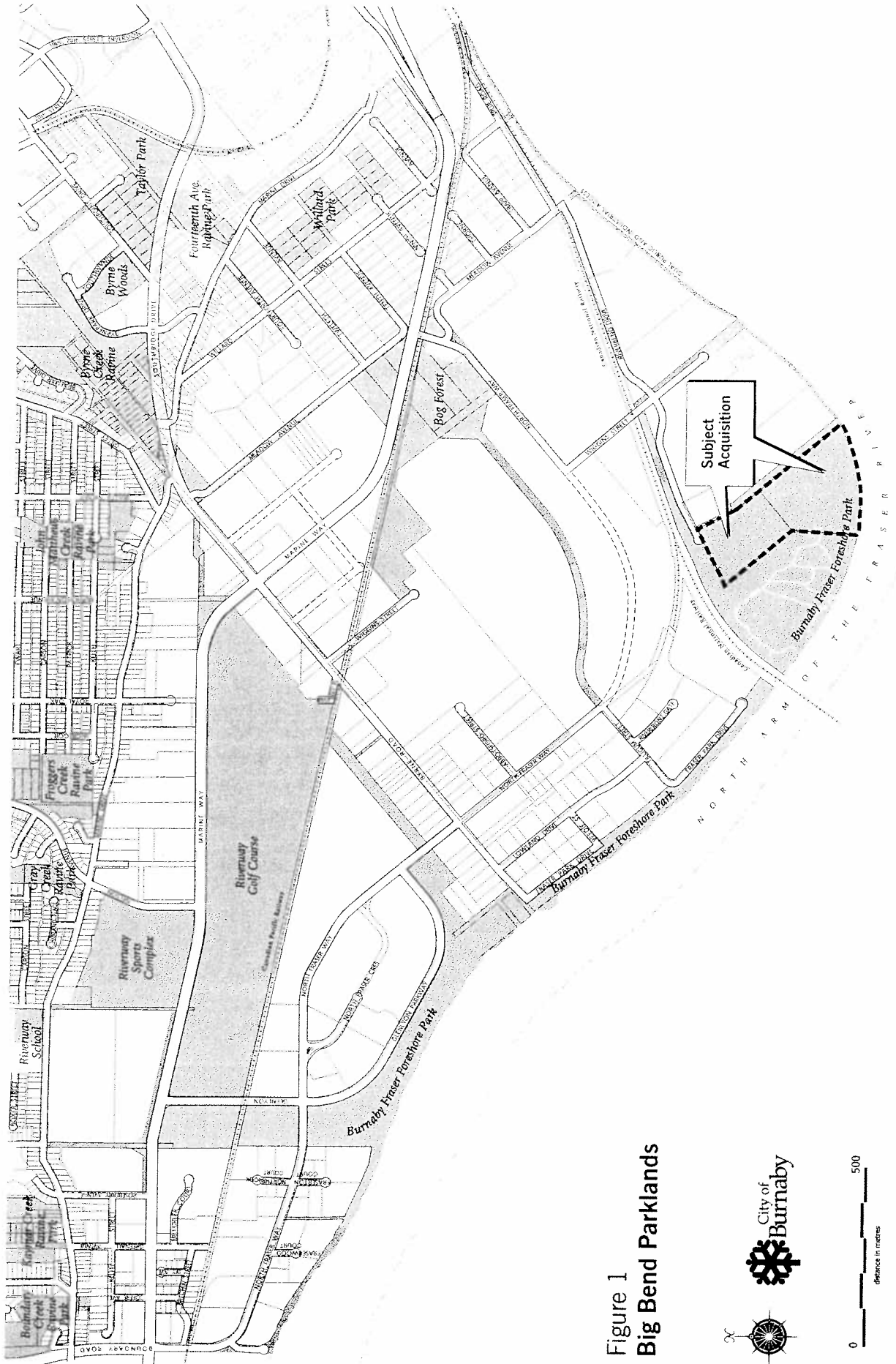


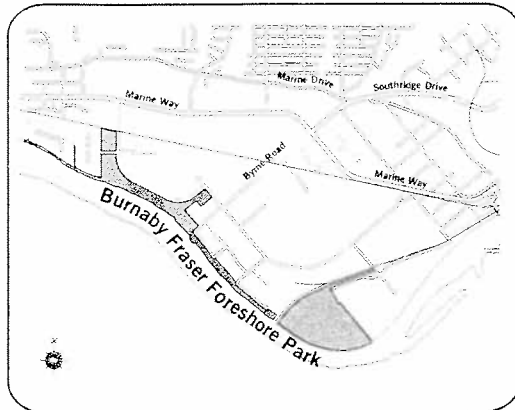
Figure 1  
Big Bend Parklands



0 500  
distance in metres

2004 March 29

# Burnaby Fraser Foreshore Park



Wetlands are one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in Canada. Over the past century however, 96% of the wetlands on the North Arm of the Fraser River have been lost to development, and remaining areas are isolated in small parcels.

In 1991, the City of Burnaby sought to protect valuable wetland habitat, by purchasing 40 acres of seasonally-flooded land on the Burnaby bend of the Fraser River (Site A). The City worked with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and other agencies to rehabilitate a diversity of habitats on this land including salmonid rearing channels, riparian forests, and a dry meadow for raptor habitat.

The City has now acquired an equivalent additional area of seasonally flooded, riparian and wet meadow habitat contiguous to the existing park (Site B). This acquisition creates a core nature park of biologically diverse ecosystems within a central portion of the Big Bend area.

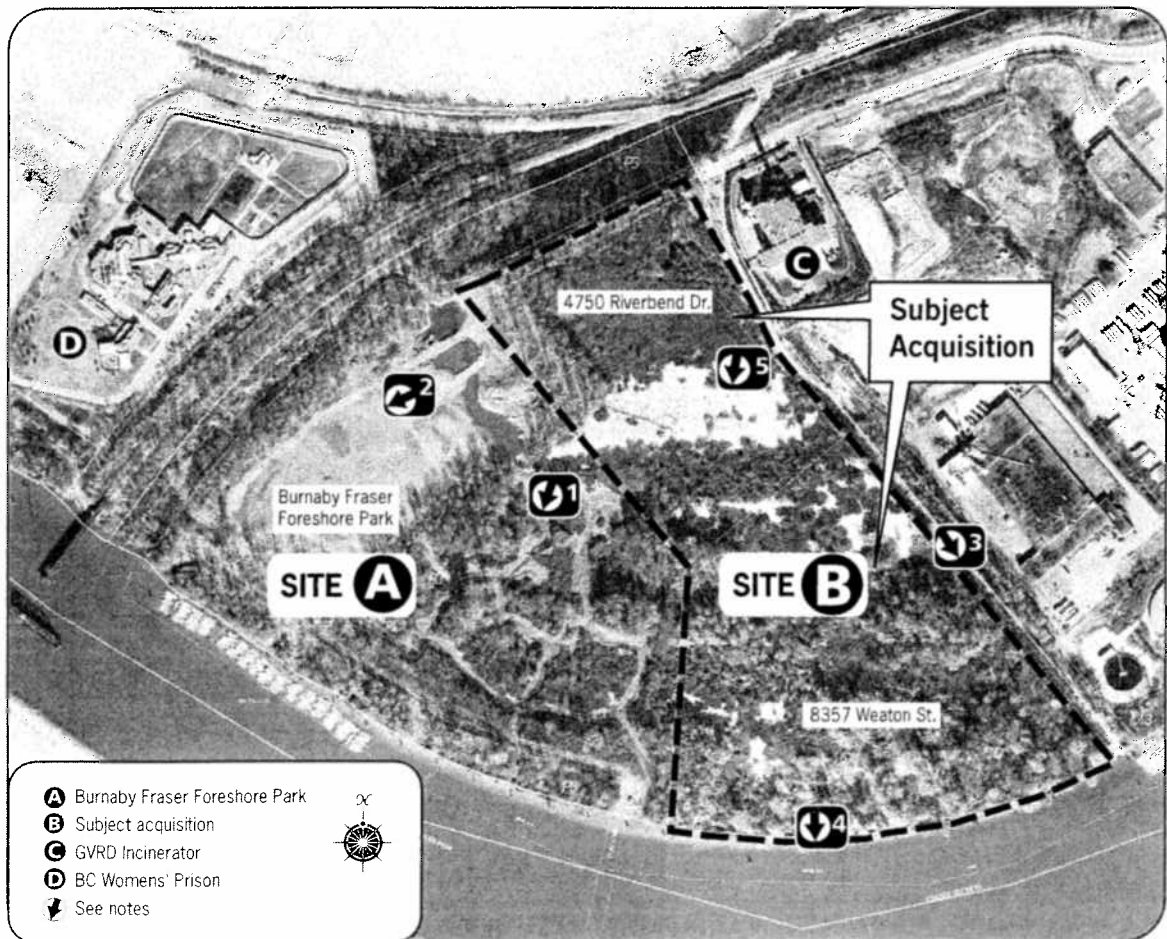
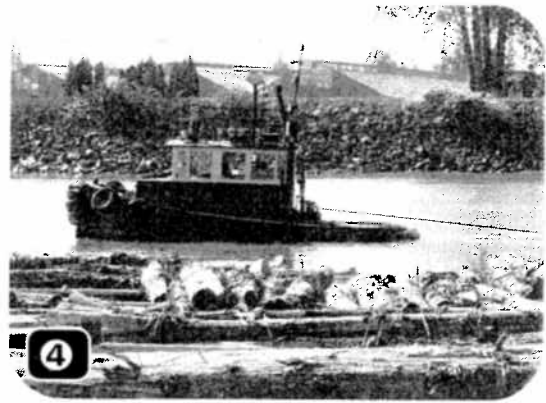


Figure 2  
Environmental Features



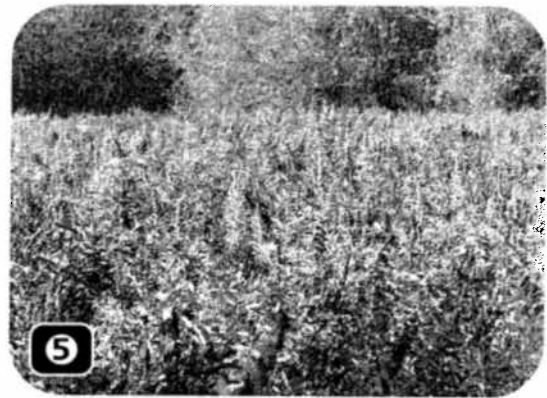
The eastern portion of the existing park includes salmonid rearing channels constructed by the City and Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 1994. These channels are currently inaccessible to human park users, and provide juvenile salmonids with protected waters for rearing. The City plans to construct controlled interpretive viewing overlooking a small section of the channels to inform and educate park users.



The City will seek to develop an environmentally sensitive walking and cycling trail through the forest of Site B to connect with the City's trail network. This trail may provide opportunities for public viewpoints of the working Fraser River.



The western portion of the existing park includes a dry grassland meadow, which provides excellent hunting habitat for raptors. Trails wind along the western edge of the meadow, but do not intrude into the meadow.



The northern section of Site B includes a rare wetland tidal meadow. The City will protect the wet meadow in parkland. Trails would avoid the meadow to prevent bird disturbance, but allow limited viewing opportunities.

The wet meadow has been classified as a Tidal Freshwater Marsh and is a primary breeding habitat for a variety of bird species, some of which have been in decline in the Lower Mainland, especially the Nothern Harrier and Short-eared Owl. The daily tidal inundations deter most predators such as foxes and coyotes, providing protected nesting habitat for birds. These same birds may then use the adjacent riparian forest and dry meadow for hunting.



Site B includes seasonally inundated riparian forest that is considered fish habitat. A service road runs along the eastern and northern edge of the parcel, providing a beautiful walking environment.