



POLICY REVIEW SUMMARY

Environment

About Metro 2050

Metro Vancouver is updating *Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping our Future (Metro 2040)*, the regional growth strategy. Since its adoption in 2011, *Metro 2040* has been a strong and effective tool representing the regional federation's collective vision for livability and managing growth anticipated to come to our region over the long term.

Having a regional growth strategy allows Metro Vancouver and member jurisdictions to prevent urban sprawl by focusing growth (i.e., new homes and new jobs) in transit-oriented locations to support the development of livable neighbourhoods, with a range of housing, jobs, and amenities. The strategy also protects the region's vital agricultural, ecologically important, and industrial lands. These efforts support the provision of affordable housing, a diverse economy, and mobility for all, and they help prepare the region for the impacts of climate change.

Metro 2040 was co-created and supported by all municipalities in the region, Tsawwassen First Nation, TransLink, adjacent regional districts, and the Metro Vancouver Board. The direction provided by the strategy recognizes the region's collective vision for the future and the importance of cooperation among member jurisdictions to create that future together.

The regional growth strategy is being updated. Though many of the goals, actions, and tools that are working well in *Metro 2040* will remain unchanged, updates will extend the strategy to the year 2050 and allow the region to better respond to critical and emerging issues such as climate change, social equity, resilience, and housing affordability. Updates will also align the strategy with *Transport 2050* (TransLink's new regional transportation strategy) and implement policy improvements in a number of areas. The updated strategy, anticipated to be completed in 2022, will be called *Metro 2050*.



Policy Review Summaries

Content for *Metro 2050* is being developed through a series of 11 themed Policy Reviews scoped to address specific policy topics in the regional growth strategy like Agriculture or the Environment. Each Policy Review is looking at the current policies in *Metro 2040* related to the topic area, identifying gaps and opportunities, engaging with stakeholders and others, and developing policy recommendations to be integrated into *Metro 2050*. Upon completion of the Policy Reviews, Metro Vancouver is producing Policy Review Summaries to support a broad understanding by decision makers and interested stakeholders of the issues and updates proposed that will guide the drafting of amended and new policy directions for each topic area in *Metro 2050*.

Ecologically Important Lands

Natural spaces provide many 'ecosystem services' (Figure 1), including capturing carbon, absorbing and cleaning floodwater, cooling cities, and protecting coastal communities. If these areas are protected and remain healthy and biodiverse, they will continue to help the region adapt to climate change.

Metro Vancouver residents also clearly value parks and other green spaces. In 2019, the Metro Vancouver regional parks system welcomed nearly 12 million visitors, with visitation records set at 7 regional parks and 2 regional greenways. That same year, TransLink surveyed over 30,000 Metro Vancouver residents and 72% stated they valued "natural areas like parks and forests" most in their neighbourhoods. When asked about the future of the region, residents noted "the loss of green space" as one of their top three concerns.

Metro 2040 includes several tools and policies to protect important ecosystems, however a consistent, science-based regional ecosystem inventory was not available during its development. New datasets have revealed that the region is losing sensitive ecosystems within and outside the regional Conservation and Recreation land use designation that is intended to "protect significant ecological and recreation assets". Between 2009 and 2014, 1,600 hectares of sensitive and modified ecosystems were lost in the region, including:

- 1,000 hectares of forest,
- 120 hectares of wetland, and
- 100 hectares of riparian areas.

This trend is expected to continue as many hectares of sensitive ecosystems are on land planned for future urban development. Strategic protection, enhancement, and restoration will be needed to preserve vital ecosystem services – water purification, clean air, carbon storage, flood control, crop pollination, shading, cooling, physical and mental health benefits – that these ecosystems provide.

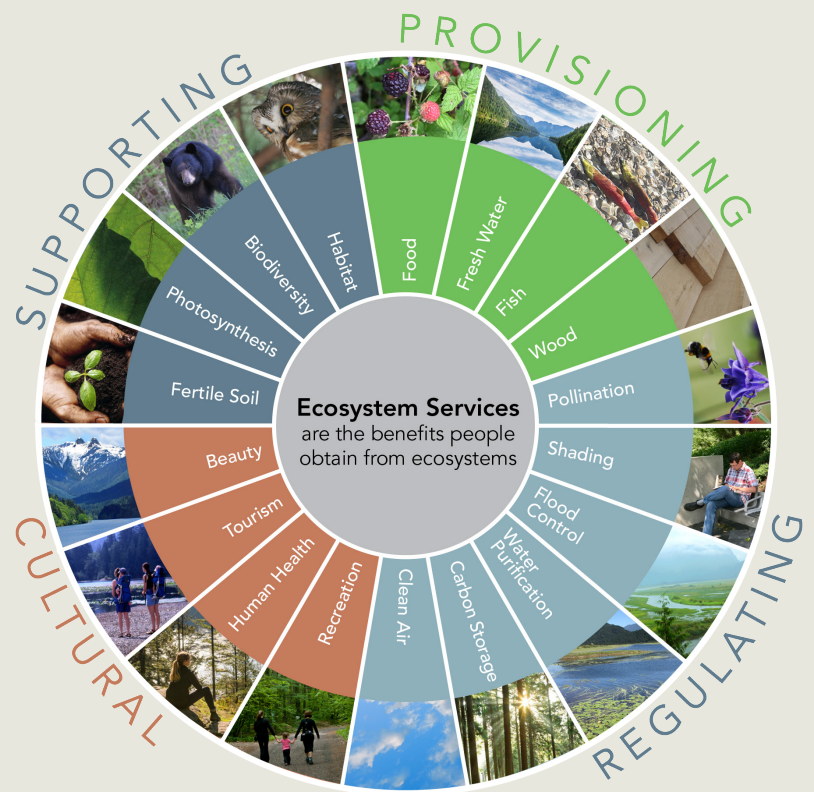


Figure 1 Ecosystem Services provided by healthy ecosystems

Updates to the regional growth strategy are needed to strengthen the protection and enhancement of ecologically important lands and reflect current local environmental planning priorities, both within and beyond urban areas.

WHAT'S CHANGING

The following changes to the regional growth framework are recommended:

1. Clarify the definition of intended uses within the regional Conservation and Recreation land use designation
2. Integrate Metro Vancouver's Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory map and policies
3. Include an aspirational regional target for protecting, enhancing and restoring ecosystems
4. Support a regional green infrastructure network
5. Reflect emerging priorities (tree canopy cover, invasive species, and ecosystem services)
6. Support equitable access and exposure to green space in urban areas

BENEFITS

These changes will provide the following benefits:

- Additional clarity, collaboration and support
- Strong scientific basis for ecosystem protection
- Enhanced ecosystem protection and consideration of ecosystem services
- Greater support for new environmental land use planning priorities
- Improvements in green space equity

Recommendation #1: Clarify the definition of the regional Conservation and Recreation land use designation

Metro 2040 defines the Conservation and Recreation land use designation in two places in the document, with slightly different terminology and permitted land uses identified. Member jurisdictions have included different land uses within this regional designation.

This recommendation is to:

- consolidate the two definitions of Conservation and Recreation;
- better define terms such as 'major parks' and 'commercial uses', with consideration of local context; and
- track and report on 'renewable resource extraction areas' (e.g. recently logged forest, a landfill, a quarry, drinking water, and wastewater treatment plants) that are currently designated Conservation and Recreation.

The objective of these clarifications is to increase the consistent application of policies for the designation across the region and improve understanding of changes over time. Member jurisdictions could consider proposing additions to this designation through Regional Context Statements after the adoption of *Metro 2050*.

Recommendation #2: Integrate the Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory map and policies

The Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) has been developed since 2011, and this dataset maps the region's most ecologically important areas that should be considered for protection. The SEI identified that over 87% of the region's sensitive ecosystems are located on lands designated Conservation and Recreation, but the remaining 13% (~17,000 hectares) are currently found on lands within the other regional land use designations. In 2017, *Metro 2040* was amended to reflect SEI performance measures, but SEI-related policies were not added to the regional growth strategy at that time.

This recommendation will replace *Metro 2040* Map 10 (Natural Features and Land Cover) with the SEI and add ecosystem protection and restoration policies that would apply within and outside of urban areas.



Recommendation #3: Include an aspirational regional target for protecting, enhancing, and restoring ecosystems

Member jurisdictions and other stakeholders identified a role for the region to set a vision through aspirational targets for ecosystem protection, enhancement, and restoration. Member jurisdictions can then collectively respond to shared regional objectives in a consistent way.

An example target could be protecting an additional 10% of the region to ensure 50% of the land base is protected as a natural area. Working collectively to better protect ecosystems across the region will ensure these lands remain healthy and provide residents with vital ecosystem services.

Recommendation #5: Reflect emerging priorities (tree canopy cover, invasive species, and ecosystem services)

Since 2011, several member jurisdictions have adopted policies to enhance tree canopy cover, manage invasive species, and consider ecosystem services in decision making. This recommendation adds new regional policies to support local environmental land use planning efforts. Collective leadership on these priorities will help member jurisdictions continue to address the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss in their communities.

Recommendation #4: Support a regional green infrastructure network

Green infrastructure includes natural assets (e.g. forests, wetlands, parks), enhanced assets (e.g. urban trees, rain gardens), and engineered assets (e.g. permeable pavement, green roofs). In recent years, the importance of connected green infrastructure networks has been broadly recognized worldwide; however, *Metro 2040* does not contain clear actions to support this work. A regional green infrastructure network would improve ecosystem connectivity, maximizing biodiversity, climate resilience, and human health benefits.

This recommendation adds new policies to collaboratively identify, protect, enhance, and restore natural and urban elements of a regional green infrastructure network.

Recommendation #6: Support equitable access and exposure to green space in urban areas

Enhancing green space access and exposure (i.e. routine, every day 'micro-contacts' provided by street trees or pocket parks) within neighbourhoods provides benefits for physical and mental health. These spaces enhance health and well-being for residents, and can mitigate the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling. This recommendation will add new policies to enhance green space in urban areas, particularly in underserved communities, with a focus on reducing climate-related health risks.

REGIONAL PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The recommended changes align with *Metro 2040*'s established core regional planning principles to:

- Put growth in the right places (centres and corridors)
- Protect important lands (agricultural, ecologically important, industrial)
- Support complete communities
- Create diverse and affordable housing, better mobility, and a prosperous economy
- Enable efficient urban infrastructure (utilities, transit).

NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Member jurisdictions have had opportunities to provide feedback on these recommendations through Metro Vancouver's Regional Planning Advisory Committee, Regional Planning Committee, and Board. Member jurisdictions may submit questions or request a presentation from Metro Vancouver staff by sending an email to regionalplanning@metrovancover.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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