

NANAIMO'S 'NATURAL WONDER' POISED TO ATTRACT MORE VISITORS

Ammonite Falls and Benson Creek Falls Regional Park improvements set to provide regional economic boost

COURTENAY, 14 May 2020 – Facilitating trail access to Ammonite Falls, one of the mid-Island's most-stunning natural attractions, is set to begin shortly with support from Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET).

The project will capitalize on a regionally significant area for outdoor enthusiasts by easing entry to and mobility within the Benson Creek Falls Regional Park, as well as providing local Snuneymuxw First Nations' historical context and ecological information. Access to Ammonite Falls, currently only reachable by rope along a slippery, muddy bankside, has excluded visitors with restricted or limited mobility. Park improvements will add a staircase, viewing platform and truss bridge that extends across Benson Creek. To alleviate congestion at the Jameson Road parking lot, 40 additional parking stalls (including two handicapped spaces) will be built and a new formalized access point with signage for hikers at Weigles Road.

"Sites like Ammonite Falls are a major draw for visitors," explains ICET Board Chair Josie Osborne. "Improving their access and experience leads to longer stays, return visits and a larger economic impact for the region."

ICET economic analysis forecasts impressive year-round benefits from the project, which will further expand on growth opportunities within the region's hospitality and tourism sectors and expand on its investment potential. The park is expected to attract an additional 10,000 annual visitor-days, including during the normally slow spring and fall shoulder seasons. New and existing businesses will also gain through the possible service expansion that includes guided hikes, rainforest walks or cruise ship excursions.

"In the past two months, it has become increasingly clear how important it is to have access to parks and trails for the health and mental well-being of the public," said Ian Thorpe, Chair of the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). "This project will not only provide greater access to Benson Creek Falls Regional Park, it will also assist the local construction community and the project will be finished at a key time when the tourism sector will need additional support."

The RDN in partnership with Tourism Vancouver Island (TVI) have developed a sustainability plan that will help educate visitors on safe, sustainable and regenerative tourism practices while visiting the park. They have also developed a model of user engagement that encourages understanding and enthusiasm for citizen stewardship of the natural space and a digital communications toolkit to help disseminate online.

ICET has contributed \$103,135 to the project's overall \$668,365 cost. Park improvements are expected to begin soon.

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Building a diverse and sustainable economy.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET)

Created and capitalized by the Province of BC in 2006, the Island Coastal Economic Trust's (ICET) mission is to create a more diverse and globally competitive North Island-Sunshine Coast and Central-South Island economy. In partnership with local and regional government, nonprofits and indigenous groups, ICET serves nearly half a million residents with a range of economic diversification funding programs and support services. Through a unique community centered decision-making process, more than \$52 million in funding has been approved supporting over 200 initiatives, led by more than 150 community-based partners. These investments have leveraged over \$270 million in new investment into the region creating more than 2500 construction phase jobs and 2650 long term permanent jobs. To learn more, visit www.islandcoastaltrust.ca

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