Notice to Park Visitors
Elk Falls Park - Restoration Project

While enjoying the park, please adhere to site and trail closures and be aware of working equipment.

Visitors to Elk Falls are being advised of a park restoration project at former parking areas - located in the old growth forested areas of the park.

In May 2019, work will begin to restore sites by removing old pavement and park furniture, rebuilding new access trails, decompacting the ground and complexing it with coarse woody material. New picnic tables will be installed at the lower area and emergency access will remain in all locations.

In the fall of 2019, planting of native vegetation will commence in restored areas as well as final trail grading, fencing and signage.

The Restoration Project Area map below indicates the work locations and where temporary closure locations will be in place.

Thank you for your cooperation.
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Background
Elk Falls Park Day Use Area provides public access to walking and viewing opportunities along the Campbell River above Elk Falls. The park attracts in excess of 175,000 day users at this location during peak times June—September. It is set among the one of the largest stands of old growth Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar forest in the park, spared by the 1938 wildfire. This area of the park is accessed from the Brewster Lake Road adjacent to John Hart Lake (City of Campbell River Water Supply) and the BC Hydro John Hart Dam 750 meters away.

It is comprised of two parking areas (an upper and lower parking area) and a network of loop trails and a visitor viewpoint. The attractions in the park include the parks name sake-Elk Falls at 60 meters tall and the upper canyon, numerous riverside pools and water features. The parks forests are of significance containing large old growth Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar trees that are home to numerous bird and wildlife species.

Parking Area Concerns
These old parking areas are in a declining state – several cracks, holes and voids exist in the paved surfaces caused by – windfall and diseased tree failures, lifting root pads, excessive traffic, sub-standard construction, poor drainage and freeze / thaw events. The lower parking area consists of poor grades requiring closure during winter snow and ice conditions. Both sites are under capacity to accommodate the current levels of public visitation at the park. These parking areas were constructed in the 40’s during a time of lower public use, when smaller vehicles where the norm. They presently only accommodate safely about 15 vehicles each and they do not accommodate larger buses, towed RVs or trailers, during peak times.

Ecosystem Values / Risks
The old growth trees and habitat in Elk Falls Park are significant natural assets. Most of the access and parking areas were constructed immediately adjacent to these mature trees and by today’s standards would be of concern due to impacts on roots and the need to safely manage hazardous/dangerous trees adjacent to high-use target facilities, as part of BC Parks public safety program.

In March 2012, a significant wind event in the area resulted in a significant large number of old growth tree failures along the approach roads. Most of these very large trees failed in the lower roots and stems as a result of a root rot. The resulting closure and clean-up kept the park closed to public access at this location for 6 weeks.

Under the BC Parks Danger/Wildlife Tree Program, BC Parks is mandated to manage tree risks in areas of high use with fixed targets such as parking areas. In this location this results in an increasing amount of high value wildlife trees being identified as public safety risks.

Project Benefits
With the creation of the Park’s new higher capacity/standardized parking area with all new trailhead and access needs - it allows for the deactivation and reconfiguration of the old parking and access roads in the park for the benefit of minimizing risk to public and allowing for ecosystem recovery without having to manage for significant hazard/wildlife trees. Benefits will include:

- Redirect all future park traffic to the newly built and standardized parking area with barrier-free access, standardized facilities and opportunities for visitor services and information.
- Restore ecosystem values by removing paved surfaces, complexing with woody debris and replanting with native species. Allows for wildlife and habitat trees to remain being less subject to annual Wildlife/Danger Tree program removals.
- Reconfigure the existing parking and access areas to walking trail uses and emergency access only and remove substandard parking from the old growth areas.
- Redirect all future recreational / vehicle traffic away from the City of Campbell River’s community drinking supply and intake at John Hart Lake.
- Accommodates the pending John Hart Dam Seismic Upgrade Project (approx. 2020 – 2024) and any related long term construction related road closures at Brewster Lake Road.
- Aligning BC Parks future operations of parking and access to be focussed on one primary parking facility - versus three across the upper day use area in complex locations.