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Crews carving out forest-based adventure park



JM Perreault is part of a 10-person crew clearing dead and dying trees and brush in the forest for a WildPlay adventure park in Colwood.

Edward Hill/News staff

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The former frisbee golf forest at West Shore Parks and Recreation is being trimmed and cleaned up to make way for a canopy-level adventure park.

Crews are removing dangerous trees and hanging debris in preparation for installing a WildPlay ariel park in the forest wedged between the velodrome and Ocean Boulevard. Tom Benson, president of WildPlay, said the four-acre forest is in rough shape.

“It’s surprising people go in there at all. It’s not a safe forest,” he said. “There is a lot of standing dead, a lot of deadfalls, a lot of stuff hanging in branches. It will take a chunk of work and money to get going.”

Between the survey by an arborist and getting tree crews on the ground, a number of trees “just fell down,” he said, likely from wind and the added weight of rain and debris. Trees that aren’t ready to fall are in surprisingly good health, he noted.

WildPlay has parks in Nanaimo and Whistler, where people harnessed to safety lines navigate from tree to tree on tightropes, bridges, nets and various interconnected obstacles above the forest floor.

Originally thought to be too small for a full-sized ariel park, Benson said the WSPR forest will indeed fit full adult and child sections with some 70 elements, some possibly as high as 60 feet. The forest will remain public space, but with clearly marked pathways, allowing the understory to regain its health, he said. The old, now flattened BMX track will become the parking lot and entry point for the park.

The forest was closed to frisbee golf and public use a few years ago when an arborist deemed it a public hazard, said WSPR operations manager Wade Davies. WSPR couldn’t afford to remediate the forest, Davies said, where WildPlay is footing the bill for cleanup and installation of its obstacles.

WSPR and WildPlay have a revenue sharing agreement that would see the recreation centre earn three to 3.5 per cent of annual gross sales, have 25 per cent discounts for recreation centre camps and programs, and 150 tickets for leadership youth and low-income West Shore families.

“We are getting a lot of good public support for this,” Davies said.

Benson said they are still working on design details such as which obstacles will go where, but they expect to be open by mid-October. The adult course can take several hours to complete.

“From what we’ve seen in Nanaimo ... by far most of our business is local people,” Benson said. “This is a fantastic area for families, the bus

access is great. It's great added value to the rec centre."

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