

**Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Meeting Notes
December 19, 2023, 9 – 12 at the Fish Health Building**

Please address corrections/additions to
cowichanstewardshiproundtable@gmail.com
www.cowichanstewardship.com

Welcome and acknowledgement that our co-chairs today are hosting in person from the traditional territories of Cowichan Tribes.

Please note that this record was created by volunteers at Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (CSRT) Meetings. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information, statements, and decisions recorded in them, there may be some inaccuracies, errors, omissions, or lack of completeness within the notes based on time and other constraints. Each CSRT participant is responsible for reviewing notes of their contributions and sending in edits should they be necessary. Individuals accessing these notes should not rely on them as a complete or accurate record, or as their only source of knowledge about key issues discussed. Individuals are urged to contact the group(s) or individual(s) associated with information provided in these notes if relying on them.

Please also note that there is the Project Tracking Sheet that people can fill out with information about new projects, as well as add developments for ongoing projects to. This tracking sheet can be accessed and edited by CSRT members here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19M8l_PRGvY6gNWfhFAmdZEDm-trjEKtvu_wXfB_BCt8/edit?usp=sharing.

Facilitator and Host: Genevieve Singleton (Co-Chair Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable), plant ecologist, nature interpreter; Parker Jefferson (Co-Chair Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable)

Regrets:

- Danielle Paydil (Cowichan Watershed Board Executive Director)
- Sunny Mizushima (DFO)
- Richard Lake (Sidney Anglers Association)
- Pamela Williams (Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre)
- Cheri Ayers (Waters Edge Biological Consultants)
- Kate Fulton (BC Parks)
- Jim Deck (Cowichan Lake River Stewardship Society)
- Karen Deck (CLRSS)
- Stephanie Cottell (Cowichan Land Trust)
- Barry Hetschko (Somenos Marsh Society)
- Katie Mosewich (Environmental Services Administrative Assistant – Environmental Services Division (CVRD))
- Sarah Butterfield (CVRD, Parks & Trails)
- Ellery Jackson-Renz (CVRD, Environmental Services)

- Jennifer Shepherd (Xwulqw'selu Connections)

Attendees:

- Genevieve Singleton (Co-Chair Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable)
- Parker Jefferson (Co-Chair Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable)
- Ellen Campbell, Lawyer (law firm & art studio) & Researcher (Indigenous Law Research Unit, UVic)
- Paul Rickard (Sidney Anglers Association)
- Tom Rutherford, CWB Director of Strategic Priorities
- Pam Jorgensen (Mosaic Forest Management)
- Joe Saysell (Friends of the Cowichan)
- Bruce Coates (Cowichan Valley Naturalists, Cowichan Land Trust)
- Karen Jarvis (Concerned Citizen)
- Jim Wisnia (Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre)
- Heather Wright, DFO community advisor
- Staff from BC Freshwater Fisheries, Graham Nessman, Tony and another staff person joined us for lunch
- The team from Cowichan Tribes also joined us for lunch:
 - Audra Stacey - Captain, S-hwuhwa'us Thi'lut Kw'atl'kwa (Thunderbird Protecting the Ocean)
 - Tim Kulchyski - Jr. Biologist
 - Henry James - Environmental Monitor / support to the Jr. Biologist (currently on Temporary Working Assignment)
 - Clark Johnny Jr. - Crew Member, S-hwuhwa'us Thi'lut Kw'atl'kwa
 - Kim Lagimodiere - Program Coordinator, S-hwuhwa'us Thi'lut Kw'atl'kwa
 - Another gentleman Cameron Joe - Crew Trainee, S-hwuhwa'us Thi'lut Kw'atl'kwa

Presentation By: Kevin Pellett

Notes Taken By: Ellen Campbell

CSRT Business:

Introduction

- 'Uy' netulh. 'Uy' kwunus 'i lumnamu.¹ (Good morning. It is nice to see you.) We are on the unceded territory of Quw'utsun nation.

Hybrid Meeting Update

- E-meetings will get set up as soon as Freshwater Fisheries Society is able to provide wifi access.

¹ This is Hul'qumi'num', which is the language of the Quw'utsun peoples. Also note that Xwulqw'selu is the Hul'qumi'num name for the Koksilah river.

Upcoming Speakers

- Pam and Genevieve discussed a speaker regarding tree species in the future. Jan. 16, Tom Rutherford, Cowichan Watershed Board Director of Strategic Priorities, update on projects
- Feb. 20, Sandra Thompson and team, Cultural Connections, Social Planning Cowichan
- March 19. Paul Fletcher, Paul Gowland and team, update on Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society projects

Round the Table

Parker Jefferson

- Kindergarten Children and Bats
 - I was asked by Genevieve to give a talk about bats to a kindergarten class. I have a powerpoint with cute bat pictures. There were 20 children sitting on the floor. There was so much enthusiasm. They had made bat houses and they wanted me to talk about what colour we should paint them, etc. This was a very hopeful, positive experience.

Bruce Coates (Cowichan Valley Naturalists, Cowichan Land Trust)

- Cowichan Valley Naturalists
 - December 30th Christmas Bird Count
 - Vancouver Island Naturalists are doing our annual Christmas Bird count. IBAs were set up to protect migratory bird stopovers because they go beyond international boundaries. We have two here, the Somenos Marsh, and the Estuary, both within the Christmas Bird Count. We just got full time funding to look after that for three years. Liam will be going out in a boat to do this. This goes all the way up to Sansum Narrows.
 - There is a meeting afterwards for hot drinks at the Cowichan Agricultural Society Building (the bungalow in the parking lot across from VIU).
 - People who are interested in coming can look at our facebook page or email us at cvns@naturecowichan.net
 - Speakers Night January 6th
 - Monday January 6th, our first Speaker of the new year will be a presentation from Barry Hetschko and Willie Harvie and other naturalists.
 - Check our Facebook page for information on this event.
 - Third Tuesday of the month are our evening meetings.

- Bruce expressed thanks to Pam Jorgenson of Mosaic Forest Management for coming to the Xwulqw'selu Working Group.
- Cowichan Land Trust
 - Cowichan Land Trust recently got a large donation we are hoping to use towards a "covenant accelerator fund" to increase the ability for people to put conservation covenants on their properties.

Karen Jarvis

- I'm interested in the river.

Paul Rickard (Sidney Anglers Association, former co-chair of the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable)

- Weir Replacement
 - I have been following up on weir replacement.
- Fish Kill Coverage
 - I am also following up on the fish kill and trying to find out why it was so under-reported in the press, but since there has been better information on it.
- Fish Kill Mitigation
 - There is a meeting with federal provincial biologists and others to help prevent a fish kill in the future. They have narrowed it down to a combination of factors: water flow, extended period of hot weather, and high nutrient loading from the Lake Cowichan sewage outfall. Those three things combined created a thick algal bloom, which reduced the dissolved oxygen to the point that the fish were killed. Unfortunately, the mats of algae broke up and the immediate oxygen deprivation was prevented. They have had a meeting including Kevin, Mike McCoullagh, our south coast director (who sits on the Watershed Management Board for DFO), and middle provincial regional staff, and they talked about this issue and coming up with mitigation measures. Sidney Anglers Association may get more involved in more letter writing (we have already written one) and other elements to try to get them more involved. They are also putting into place a significant amount of monitoring. They've discovered the Ph of the water in the river is taking large swings. It was recording up to 9 and a little above nine at times in the river. Just through some reading I have done, it will cause skin irritation and eye problems if you are in that kind of Ph level. So it is an interesting side note. The good thing is that monitoring will be able to continue.
 - Parker Jefferson responded with a few comments: The Cowichan Lake Stewardship Society have a great letter writing campaign on their website,

with all of the contacts too. The Ph level matches with the microscopic lesions on the fish kill report.

- Joe Saysell responded with a few comments: There was an article from Montana that showed information about fish kills with brown trout covered with lesions.
- Area 18 Sport Fishery Advisory Committee
 - We now have an area 18 Sport Fishery Advisory Committee. These local anglers meet with DFO staff and put in recommendations around regulations and so on. We brought up the fish kill in that meeting.

Joe Saysell (Friends of the Cowichan)

- Fish Kill Media Coverage
 - I remember there was quite a bit of media on the fish kill. Carla Wilson had some great coverage: <https://www.timescolonist.com/local-news/calls-to-close-cowichan-river-to-fishing-as-dead-zone-forms-7438252>.
- Cowichan Sewage
 - Speaking of the phosphate in Cowichan Sewage, they have two ponds, and another one that has been dug. They have been trying for a 10 million dollar grant they have been trying for three years now. The Mayor has updated me that they have finally gotten that funding. The difficulty is that they keep building houses in Lake Cowichan, and it is oversubscribed right now in terms of sewage. Staff are working on the installation of black plastic sheeting over the sewage lagoons in Lake Cowichan to help decrease the amount of phosphorus.
- Closure
 - Resident trout numbers have been cut $\frac{2}{3}$ down and they have moved into the upper section of the river. I am advocating for a closure of the trout fishery to help them repopulate.
- Exeter Creek
 - Update on Exeter Creek. I took Heather Wright to Exeter Creek where there was a gravel blow out. We got a hold of John Fleming, whose property it was and it was donated to the Nature Conservancy and he requested that it has to be overseen by me. Heather got back to me, and brought Jim Turner, biologist from Victoria. DFO said they would do it themselves. I lined up Chris to watch over the digging. The creek is running now, and salmon has come in. But it is not like it used to be because my idea was to dig it down to where it used to be, where the creek went right into the river and the salmon came in really strong. The day we measured it, the creek was 15 and the river was 24. So, it is good

for this year, but I have to talk to Heather some more and we can dig it down more and deeper and get it down to where it should be. They should also take out the log out at the end.

Jim Wisnia (Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre)

- We had a new board member join us. We are still looking for younger board members.
- In January we enter into strategic planning.
- Release of Fish
 - We were releasing fish we had in a tank at the Estuary Nature Centre. Where is a good place?
 - Genevieve responded with: It depends on where they are from. It is important to talk to Heather Wright first.

Pam Jorgensen (Land Use Forester with Mosaic Forest Management)

- Xwulqw'selu Connections Tour
 - A few of us had a tour, there was an excellent lunch. Kristina Disney and David shared the results they have so far. It is still in the preliminary stages. Kristina went into a lot of information around gaining and losing streams, David shared modeling work around forestry. This might be a good talk at the RT.
- Species Selection Person - I am still working on this idea for a speaker.

Ellen Campbell (Self-employed Lawyer, Researcher at the Indigenous Law Research Unit)

- Work on the Quw'utsun Water Laws Report continues, will be moving into the validation and finalization stages. For information on ILRU's work: www.ilru.ca. For those new to Indigenous Law, some resources could include:
 - Secwépemc Lands and Resources Law Report: <https://ilru.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Secwepemc-Law-Book-July-2018-1.pdf>
 - Coast Salish Child and Caregiver Nurturance Report: https://ilru.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NI%C8%BDTUO_Toolkit.pdf
Casebook: https://ilru.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NI%C8%BDTUO_AbridgedCasebook.pdf
 - Academic Articles: Napoleon, Val, and Hadley Friedland. "An Inside Job: Engaging with Indigenous Legal Traditions through Stories." McGill Law Journal, vol. 61, no. 4, 2016.

Tom Rutherford (Cowichan Watershed Board, Director of Strategic Priorities)

- New Executive Director
 - I stepped down as executive director in September 2022. Our new executive director is Danielle Paydli. She is really connected in the water world. Jill Thompson is still involved in outreach, engagement, planning organizational support, and so on. I am involved in 2 main files:, Xwulqw'selu water sustainability plan and Cowichan Weir. Heather is involved with leading our target working groups.
- Fish Kill
 - There was a lot of media coverage.
 - The agencies are engaged (WLRS, DFO) CWB is hoping to partner with PSF to bring resources to a collaborative response. We need to take action or this could (and probably will) happen again.
- Weir
 - CWB members, staff, and partners have been working hard on Government relations to move the weir project There have been ongoing conversations with Ministers Cullen and Rankin as well as senior staff members. It is anticipated that MIRR may have a greater role moving forward including using DRIPA as a mechanism to form a G2G partnership with Cowichan tribes to facilitate licensing and ownership issues moving forward.
<https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>
 - I am cautiously optimistic that we may be receiving some good news from the province on the funding portion of this this towards year end.
 - Infrastructure Canada Grant: Minister McKenna and Chief Seymour announced the 24 million dollar grant from the feds in 2019. Of that 24, 14 million is going to the weir. The other 10 million is for flood mitigation works in the mid and lower river. The proposal was submitted in 2018. Since then, some of the inriver projects have been completed with other funding while others are no longer relevant. We have been having meetings monthly with infrastructure Canada trying to free up that money but have to come up with the partnership money (14M) and also be able to clearly identify who owns each piece of infrastructure (eg. who will own the weir and hold the license). So there is still a piece of work to be done to clearly define ten million dollars worth of work in the river. The general theme of the proposed projects was to implement strategic projects that would allow the river to occupy more of the floodplain (better for fish habitat, mitigates flooding). The last little while, no one has been working on it because of staff turnover within both Cowichan Tribes and CVRD. We

just had a meeting last friday where Cowichan Tribes technical people, Rosie, Cheri Ayers, Lisa Fox and I came together. It looks like Cheri Ayers may be available to help move this along. This has to happen before we free up the federal money for the weir. One more step in a long and complicated path but..... we are getting closer!!

- Water Sustainability Planning Process
 - The Collaborative Community Advisory Table met a few weeks ago. Acknowledging that this is a G2G process it is acknowledged that the broader community also has a significant role and the CCAT will be an important part of that. We are lucky to have a great group of people sitting at that table and I feel really positive about their capacity and role moving forward. Infrastructure Canada Federal Funding to Cowichan Tribes (and how it relates to the weir)

Genevieve Singleton (co-chair of the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable)

- Thank you to Parker and Ellen for getting everything ready for the potluck and starting the meeting while I attended to my family.
- Thank you to Ellen and Karen for taking notes so diligently.
- Project Tracking Sheet
 - Reminder to continue to update the Projects Tracking Sheet. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19M8l_PRGvY6gNWfhFAmdZEDm-trjEKtvu_wXfB_BCt8/edit?usp=sharing.
- Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul (Cowichan River Day, Sunday September 22nd)
 - Genevieve is pursuing request from Cowichan Tribes to co-host Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul
- I have been busy with several projects with Cowichan Land Trust. Thank you to Stephanie Cottell and the Land Trust Board for supporting these projects.
- 1. CLT received funds from the BC Parks Parks Enhancement fund to do nature walks with Quw'utsun Knowledge Keepers and me in Cowichan River Provincial Park. I co-led nature walks with the following Knowledge Keepers:
 - Jared Qwustenuxun Williams at Stoltz picnic site
 - Tim Kulchyski at Horseshoe Bend Group Campsite
 - Ken Elliott at Glenora end of Cowichan River Provincial Park.
- There was great interest and wait lists for all of these walks. We had a focus on watershed health and salmon. This was funded with license plate funding. This funding usually goes to river day. It was so incredible, I am hoping to find funds elsewhere.
- 2. BC Parks Grant of \$5000
 - We were able to provide four school programmes working doing The Salmon and the Forest Programme This is with the Cowichan Land Trust doing administration, and the Cowichan Hatchery, through Cowichan

Tribes Reserve (property owned by the Elliot Family), providing the site. We did three schools last spring on this programme. This is new funding to provide programmes during spawning season. I have been wanting to run a locally based salmon interpretation locally for some time. The difficulty is that we don't have a great place to watch salmon consistently. When the offer was made to do these programmes based out of the Cowichan hatchery I was thrilled. Even if Salmon are not observed (river might be too high, low returns, etc) we can provide good quality salmon interpretation by visiting the Hatchery and Elliott Native Plant Nursery, which is onsite and doing a Salmon and Forest focused nature walk to the river. During the programmes we never saw a live salmon and none came into the five fingers channel. So that was disappointing, however, Ken set me up with two fresh Chinook carcasses for each program and I did a dissection on the side of the river.

- The feedback from teachers has been really awesome.
- Recent DFO Funding
 - Cowichan Land Trust received funding for signage at Cowichan Hatchery. Work must be completed by the end of March. Steph Cottell, Ken Elliott, Heather Wright and I will be working on this together. CLT was also approved funding to do another batch of Salmon and the Forest school programmes by the end of March. The above team will also work collaboratively on this. Paul Rickard suggested reaching out to Nanaimo Fish Hatchery to learn more about their school programmes.

Kevin Pellett's Presentation

- Thank you so much Kevin for your presentation on fish assessment and fish stocks.