

## Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Meeting notes

Dec. 16, 2021, 9-12 on Zoom

Please address corrections/additions to [cowichanstewardshiproundtable@gmail.com](mailto:cowichanstewardshiproundtable@gmail.com)  
[www.cowichanstewardship.com](http://www.cowichanstewardship.com)

Welcome and acknowledgement that our co-chairs host the meeting from the unceded traditional territory of Cowichan Tribes.

**Regrets:** Karen and Jim Deck (SOH, Save Our Holmes), Cole Smith (Sonia Furstenau's rep, BC Green Party), Alistair MacGregor (MP Canada), Geoff Strong (climate change scientist)

**Attendees:** Tom Rutherford: Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB), Genevieve Singleton: co-chair Cowichan Stewardship Round Table (CSRT) and Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project (CSSP), Parker Jefferson, co-chair CSRT, Richard Lake: Sidney Anglers, Ian Morrison (CVRD, Dir. Area F), Barry Hetschko: Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (SMWS) and Cowichan Valley Naturalists (CVNS), Rick Bryan: Recreational Paddlers, Bruce Coates: CVNS, Neil Anderson: Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (SMWS), Rick Bryan and Edmond Duggan (Paddlers), Stephanie Chong: Fraser Basin Council (FBC), Paz Rainville (new FBC member), David Slade, Rupert Koyote, Carsten Hunter, Ken Gray: Mill Bay & District Conservation Society (MBDCS), Peter Woods (BC Parks), Sarah Megyesi: New BC Park Ranger, Bernie Juurlink: Shawnigan Basin Society (SBS), Joe Saysell: Friends of the Cowichan), Jane Kilthei Cowichan Estuary Nature Center (CENC), Brian Houle: Paper Excellence-Crofton, Heather Pritchard: forester and CWB staff

### CSRT Business:

- Thanks to Karen Deck for taking November notes and most of the notes in the past year. Bruce Coates took notes today, Thank you Bruce.
- A conversation was held about whether there is a need for CSRT Meeting notes. There is little feedback that they are read. This concern was brought forward by Genevieve saying that the taking of notes and follow-up editing takes up volunteer time, that members may not be aware of. It is made more difficult by doing them on a Zoom meeting. After helpful feedback it was determined that the notes are helpful to many. It was decided that we would continue with them but it would be appreciated if people would step up to take turns taking notes and editing. Please contact Genevieve at [cowichanstewardshiproundtable@gmail.com](mailto:cowichanstewardshiproundtable@gmail.com)
- Tributes were made to David Slade's father, Ken Slade, who passed away on Dec 8<sup>th</sup>. Ken was a legend in the BC water well industry, founder of Drillwell Enterprises (1965), and served multiple terms as President of the BC Groundwater Association. He will be missed.
- Upcoming meetings, all on zoom for foreseeable future:
- January 20, 2022. Speaker: **Jamieson Atkinson, British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) speaking on log boom impact on adult chinook survival study**
- February 17: Speaker: **Geoff Strong, Climate Scientist: Climate Change**
- March 17: Speakers: **Elodie Roger/Genevieve Singleton: Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project 7-year review**

**CSRT New Business:** Just in: a 1-year funding initiative, available through the Celebration and Commemoration Program. Apply for Rivers Day 2023? Closes January 10<sup>th</sup> so needs consideration before then. Post meeting note from Genevieve: This date has since been changed to end of January.

<https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.canada.ca%2Fen%2Fcanadian-heritage%2Fservices%2Ffunding%2Fcelebration-commemoration-reopening-fund.html&data=04%7C01%7CPeter.woods%40gov.bc.ca%7C8a808e8ddcff4cb43bb608d9c01122d8%7C6fdb52003d0d4a8ab036d3685e359adc%7C0%7C0%7C637752002098037045%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLjB1Ii6k1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=QziKQY2Ypgx2stWIL3nD%2FjkwlgRhPEdgJA03jxGl3M%3D&reserved=0>

## Round the Table:

Everyone is requested to introduce themselves with name and affiliation, if any. After this, anyone who wishes to give an update can. Speakers will be kept to a time limit. **Please remember to be kind and respectful, negativity about other Roundtable members will not be tolerated. We are here to share information.**

**Jane Kilthei:** Starting a conversation with others about starting a **Restoration Hub** for collaboration on partnerships, mutual support, grants, equipment. CENC has some money for projects too. Contact [jane@cowichanestuary.ca](mailto:jane@cowichanestuary.ca)

**Stephanie Chong (FBC):** The Fraser Basin Council continues to reach out to youth in the Cowichan Valley who are interested to work on sustainability and climate change projects. There are 7 to 9 people on the team and they will be working on food security and safe spaces. Introduced newest member Paz Rainville from Pender Island.

**Rupert Koyote:** First time at CSRT meeting. He heard about it from Heather Pritchard. In Chat Rupert asked: “Has anyone reported on Menzies Creek? The Menzies/Bings confluence neighbor’s riparian area at the back of our place on Gibbins Rd.” Genevieve commented that coho run had begun.

**Tom Rutherford (CWB):** Cowichan Watershed Board continues on 4 initiatives:

- Working with CVRD, Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst, province to find a solution for the weir license.
- Water sustainability in Koksilah
- ½ million-dollar grant to monitor flows and wide riparian
- “Twin Watershed Project” (Koksilah/Chemainus) field season wound up with a bonfire gathering at Bright Angel Park. At that event, Tom reflected that we are *so very lucky* to have all this incredible expertise right here. We don’t have to hire consultants from outside the valley, so it’s not just the love of what they do, but it’s also *where they live*.

### **Genevieve Singleton (CSRT) (CSSP)**

- Genevieve shared Cole's remarks (who sent regrets) that Sonia Furstenau is in consultation with Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (MoTI) and Land Use to try to come up with some solutions to flooding in the lower Chemainus valley, including possible removal of the median on Hwy#1. Genevieve also passed along that Cheryl Quist of Quist Farms has not heard from North Cowichan (NC), or MoTI. Need to get Province, NC, MoTI, Halalt FN, and private owners all at one table.
- Genevieve noted that restoration work done with expert Dave Polster and others over many years, at both Stoltz Picnic site and Sandy Pools has been hugely affected by the recent storms. She pointed out that going forward there are some *big lessons to be learned* about how restoration projects should be done to survive the unusual flood events that are predicted to increase in future.
- Genevieve and Elodie Roger will be doing presentations on the Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project (CSSP) this spring to a variety of groups. CSSP was the vision of much missed Gerald Thom and was overseen by hard working members of Cowichan Lake River Society until a few years ago. Craig Wightman, retired BCCF staff and fisheries biologist, Genevieve and Dave Polster have been involved with the 7-year project since the beginning. It is now sponsored by BC Conservation Foundation. Elodie was contracted to be the field supervisor for the last summer. These presentations will feature a review of the past 7 years and possible steps forward.

**Barry Hetschko (SMWS):** Weekly Swan & Goose count has resumed with a small contingent. It was missed last year due to Covid. About 300 swans were counted on December 16<sup>th</sup>. Gina Hoar (SMWS) has recently seen Coho spawners in Bings Creek near the Open-Air Classroom (OAC) where two sections of habitat were restored with gravel and rocks.

**Jeremy Damborg (BCCF):** Work this summer will include geotechnical assessments at Stoltz and maintenance on the access to the sediment pond.

**Brian Houle (Paper Excellence):** Shared his screen to present graphs of Cowichan River water volume and turbidity through the storm. For example: January 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 - 560cms, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 - 640 cms.

**Joe Saysell (CLRSS):** Called in from the prairies. Lamented the combined lack of Chum returns, and the high waters that have washed away carcasses causing mal-nourished eagles, and bears not denning up. **Tom commented that DFO expected Chum returns are ~160,000 - but this year appear to be only ~24,000!** Joe re-iterated the need for a 4-month fishing closure in the upper Cowichan from Dec-Mar (inclusive). Before being opened up completely, it was Nov-Apr, so the current request is a compromise. He asked everyone to please write to the Ministry

**Parker Jefferson (CSRT):** Parker has also noted low Chum numbers and commented on the correlation of Chum and Steelhead populations suggesting they could be the next to go. Further distressing points raised: ALL runs on the Olympic Peninsula are at ~10-20% of historic levels.

Fishing Guides on the Skeena River went three weeks without catching a single fish. By contrast, Coho and Chinook runs seem fairly decent this year.

**Carsten Hunter:** Pointed out that the “switch got turned off” suddenly for Steelhead populations in Pt. Alberni rivers. He has video of a school of Coho working their way up Somenos Creek which he will copy to SMWS.

**Rick Bryan and Edmond Duggan (Paddling Community):** High water interfered with youth programs which were put on hold. Parker asked about Swiftwater Rescue and helicopter presence on the river, and hearing nothing it was assumed to be a training run. Edmond said in the chat: “There is a log in the Park that they may have been dealing with (Last Drop rapid which is right at the Marie Canyon day use area). Edmond separately in the chat: “The Koksilah gauge maxed out in November - it can’t record flows over 338 CMS (which is 4.5 meters high). My quasi-scientific estimate is that it hit 380 CMS. For those who don’t follow the gauges, it is currently flowing at 13 CMS.”

**Ian Morrison (CVRD-Director Area F):**

- Extensive storm impact on trails - especially up nearer Cowichan Lake – will take longer to repair: bigger culverts, sometimes bridges are needed, and often permits are required by DFO.
- Some key staff positions at CVRD are currently vacant – for example 3 Parks Planning Tech’s jobs are empty.
- “Assault” continues on riparian areas by development near Cowichan Lake. Most recent example was a garage placed on the “buildable” portion of a lot. This left no room for the home itself, so they built it in the riparian area. CVRD took them to court AND LOST.
- Ian also urged everyone to participate in the CVRD – OCP review.
- In chat Ian mentioned that: “Salmon observed in Ashburnham Creek in Honeymoon Bay last week.”

**Bruce Coates (CVNS):** Reported seeing Coho and Chinook in Averill Creek on Dec 10<sup>th</sup> – about a month late - and wondered if the delay, caused by early, very high water will cause more interbreeding between the two species, but may help some spawners access higher up some creeks. Bruce mentioned the **Christmas Bird Count** coming on January 3, which is a holiday, family event. Contact [Gail.mitch44@gmail.com](mailto:Gail.mitch44@gmail.com) for more information.

Bruce and earlier Genevieve encouraged everyone to participate in the NC-OCP draft review, open till December 22<sup>nd</sup>. <https://www.northcowichan.ca/EN/main/departments/planning-development/official-community-plan.html>

**Heather Pritchard (forester and CWB staff):** Heather spoke a bit about her portion of work on the “Twin Watershed” project (Chemainus/Koksilah), which was evaluating Riparian vegetation, invasives, etc. over a very wide zone - up to 100m. We hope Heather will be able to report out on her work at a future meeting.

**Peter Woods, Area supervisor, BC Parks.:** Updated us on current concerns in Cowichan River Park. He mentioned that his Area includes Gowland Todd Park and John Dean Park, which consume a fair bit of his time. He also introduced Sarah Megyesi: New Park Ranger who attended the meeting. Ian Morrison asked about re-routing the entrance to the Honeymoon Bay Campground. Also, lots of community interest in limiting speeds along the road in that area. Peter will report back on these concerns.

**Ken Gray (MDBCS):** Gave a presentation: *"The Little Creek That Could"* on the Shawnigan Creek Coho Project which was co-created by the Sydney Anglers. It will, and should, be shown at lots of other places in future, in hopes of inspiring similar projects elsewhere. In his intro, Tom Rutherford gave a great shout out to Ken, especially for his extensive organizing work on the project. Tom also told several wonderful stories about his own involvement while with DFO several decades ago: jobs for un-employed commercial fishermen building the stairs, a dysfunctional weir up by the lake that was constraining policy for fish release, etc. Tom also noted that Coho are "furtive ", so the project's very precise, long-term data set is valuable in its own right. This presentation was sent out by email to CSRT members.

Meeting concluded at noon. Next Meeting Jan. 20, 2022