

## Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (CSRT) notes **September 16, 2025**

### **Attendance:**

Genevieve Singleton (Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable);  
Parker Jefferson, (Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable);  
Tom Rutherford (Cowichan Watershed Board);  
Barry Hetschko (Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre);  
Jim Deck (Cowichan Lake River Stewardship Society (CLRSS));  
Karen Deck (Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD));  
Colleen Terlien (Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (SMWS));  
Ellery Jackson-Renz (Environmental Services, CVRD);  
Jacquie Taylor (Bring Back the Bluebirds)  
Ben Puszka (BC Parks)  
Ernie Lea (Sidney Anglers)

### **Attending Online:**

Karen Jarvis

### **9:00-9:30 am - CSRT Business**

1. ***We are hosted on Cowichan Tribes continuously occupied, unceded territory.***
2. ***Appreciation to Fish Health staff and Freshwater Fisheries Society***  
for the use of their meeting room and for providing Zoom access. Thank you to Karen and Jim Deck for bringing coffee and snacks!
3. ***Issue with email bounce-back; specifically, with Shaw email addresses.*** If anyone with a Shaw email has the chance to review their junk folder that would be great. Apparently CVRD had a similar issue which is now resolved? Parker mentioned an “old system” that needs to be updated.
4. ***Send attendance list around.***  
Regrets from: Stephanie, Jennifer Shepherd, Pamela
5. ***Review of notes.***  
Last meeting was at Stoltz, and it was a great success! A wonderful opportunity to come together and be by the river.
6. ***Website***  
Thanks to Sarah Mullock for keeping this updated.
7. ***Future speakers***  
Oct. 21 Parker on Bats  
November 18 – TBA

December 16 – Jennifer Moss of DFO speaking on cold water refugia, Meeting followed by a potluck, staff from trout hatchery invited

## **8. Additions to agenda**

N/A

### **9:30-10:30 Round the Table**

*Please update us on your activities. Everyone introduces themselves with name and affiliation (it is not necessary to have one) and provides an update of watershed related activities, if they wish. 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. **Everyone is welcome at our meetings.** (list in order of speaking)*

#### **Parker Jefferson (CSRT)**

- Software has finally been developed to channelize data collected of bat calls (hundreds of gigabytes of bat calls!) Hope to put together a report in October/November on this bat data, which species are active, if there are more or less than there were the year before.

#### **Karen Deck (CVRD Director, Area I)**

- CVRD Directors are getting into budget season, and it's looking like it will be challenging. It is likely that some services will be cut.
- The OCP process is coming to a close; every area has had numerous opportunities to input what they do and don't want to see in their community over the past 5 years. There have been many opportunities for various forms of community input. The planning department hopes to have this go into first, second, and third reading, and passed by the end of the year. The process has come to a halt over concerns; most areas including Karen's are ready to move ahead, but there will be a special meeting regarding the OCP at 10am tomorrow. Hopefully after the meeting tomorrow people will be more on board with the OCP.

#### **Ellery Jackson-Renz (CVRD Environmental Services)**

- Ellery provided an overview of the Environmental Services Division at the CVRD, the Environmental Services team, her role as an Environmental Technician and the work happening within the Drinking Water and Watershed Protection program. This includes the implementation of the Surface Water Quality Monitoring Strategy, the development of a Groundwater Monitoring Strategy, and future implementation of our existing Hydrometric Monitoring Strategy. Galen McMenamin, the Sr. Environmental Analyst coordinating the DWWP, is working to further develop this program.
- Tom recalled the lobby for the CVRD to create the Drinking Water and Watershed Protection program, and that in order to create this, the CVRD

needed a function. There was enough community support to create that function, as the community voted significantly in favour of it in a referendum. The program is finally finding its feet.

### **Jim Deck (Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society)**

- CLRSS had their recent Street to Stream litter pick up. They went to 6 sites in Lake Cowichan to pick up waste, specifically plastic, to prevent it getting into the river with the rains coming in the fall. The goal is to prevent waste from impacting aquatic life in streams, the estuary, and ultimately the ocean. They had a turnout of ~75-100 people.
- The tube shack had their river cleanup event on Sunday as well. Their councilor is quite committed to cleanup, held accountable by property owners along upper Cowichan River who experience heavy tubing traffic throughout the summer.

### **Jacquie Taylor (Bring Back the Bluebirds)**

- Bluebirds were extirpated from the island in the 90s, and there is ongoing work to bring bluebirds back. This year is the highest combined population on the San Juan Islands since this project began.
- 9 pairs here, 28 pairs on San Juan. This is exciting for us, because our populations are connected. 9 pairs here raised 12 successful nests, ultimately resulted in 72 young this year. Very encouraging!
- The main cause of extirpation was loss of cavity nesting holes (old Garry oak trees cut down for development). The project has brought up lots of nest boxes to create habitat.
- The team has had to do translocation of birds, since bluebirds return to where they fledge.
- ~5 translocations are the number the project is comfortable with, because the bluebirds require lots of care.
- The project got lots of funding from ReturnIt this year, since they were designated as “charity of the month”. An easy way to support the project is by bringing returnables to the counter at the Norcross Rd ReturnIt and asking to put the money towards the Bluebird project.

### **Colleen Turlien (Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society)**

- Doing lots of vegetation and Parrotsfeather management.
- Outings with students from Cow Bay high are starting.
- SMWS is looking forward to attending Quw’utsun Sta’lo’ Skweyul this year.
- Around October, SMWS is hoping to get started on the meadow project, extending fencing and sowing seeds to create a pollinator garden.
- Another Nest Box auction will take place this year, opening on Sunday September 28, from 5-7 at Just Jake’s. People can bid online for a month.

### **Barry Hetschko (Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre)**

- Regrets from Pamela;
- **Update from Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre:**
- Many children had a great time at CENCs **summer camps** in July and August. CENC was fortunate to have Pheobe and Paisley come back for a second summer. Phoebe has also worked with Somenos Marsh.
- CENC had a good turnout for **Bat Night**. A walk in the estuary to learn about bats and the bat monitoring project co-hosted with CERCA and Nature Cowichan. Ended up seeing 7 species of bats. Looking forward to more collaborations.
- All are invited to CENC's **AGM** on October 8, 4 pm at the Nature Centre. They are looking to expand their team of dedicated board members. Of particular interest but not limited to treasurer, event planning, fundraising, social media.
- CENC is collaborating with Seachange to run an **Estuary Explorers program** starting Oct 16 and will run on Thursday through the school year. Details are on our website [cowichanestuary.ca](http://cowichanestuary.ca).
- **Barnacle Buddies** for young learners (ages 0-5) and their guardians starts Tuesday Sept 23rd 10:30-11:30. Details are on our website. [cowichanestuary.ca](http://cowichanestuary.ca).
- Barry is also involved with the Koksilah Watershed Group; Thursday of last week that group dropped off a petition requesting to pause logging on Mines Rd.
- Empty nest boxes on Thursday.

#### **Tom Rutherford (Cowichan Watershed Board)**

- CWB updates: everyone is invited to CWB's monthly board meeting on Monday, Sept 29, in the dining hall of Siem Lelum gym. Meeting begins at 9am, co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and CVRD.
- If you want to be on CWB's update list, contact [info@cowichanwatershedboard.ca](mailto:info@cowichanwatershedboard.ca)
- CWB is engaged in a hiring process for a part-time Executive Assistant and a part-time Communications expert; the competition closes on Monday, Sept 22; all info on [cowichanwatershedboard.ca](http://cowichanwatershedboard.ca).
- Tom has been working closely on WQ monitoring on Cowichan this year; it's been a challenging, problematic year driven by high temperatures, algal blooms, etc. Each Monday morning, key players come together to make decisions on how to best manage the river.
- A chain of events results in a diurnal shift in pH. In the daytime they skyrocket, turn ammonium to ammonia which kills fish.
- It's been a tough summer with a good ending, avoided a fish kill.
- CWB has been involved in 2 successful cleanups, Cowichan Lake cleanup and lower river cleanup; thanks to Katia for organizing. The amount of garbage collected drops every year.
- Tom is part of a weekly call with key players to determine Cowichan River flows; we are currently at 4.5cms (ideal is 7cms); this was in order to avoid pumping as long as possible. The situation is complex now, because it's not about how much water is in the river, but how much that water impacts water chemistry.

Right now, there is enough to not need to pump until October. Domtar will likely install pumps regardless as it is an intensive process. Optimistically, we may avoid pumping this year, but it will be close.

- Chinook salmon are schooling up in the bay currently; they want to swim up the river but low flows make that very hard.
- As of yesterday, 10 adult chinook and some jacks were counted. Sea lions are beginning to show up; so, the fish don't have enough water to head up river, but are at risk of predators. Generally, fish don't really start moving through until the end of the month.
- The chinook population fell to 500 in 2009 and has rebounded significantly, so we don't want to see it put at risk.
- Between the water quality work that CVRD/ Cowichan Tribes/the Province are doing, Ken Ashley has called the Cowichan River the best monitored river in Canada, and this is something to be proud of as a community.
- New weir: CWB is engaged more on technical pieces to put in place to submit license application. They are working on identifying and filling gaps needed to have the license accepted. E.g.: they were asked to do a vegetation survey, as the new weir will have a larger footprint than old weir. The Province wants to know what impacts this has on vegetation. Similarly, they need to complete an archaeological survey. These are all small pieces the Province needs in order to accept our license. There is an ongoing G2G process between the Province and Cowichan Tribes to figure out fair division of responsibilities associated with the licensing. Will be ready to submit licensing application in the next month or two.

### **Ben Puszka (BC Parks)**

- Finishing up trail upgrades, including the Skutz Falls loop trail, and a new bridge.
- New split rail near Stoltz Campground has been installed to prevent further erosion, same around 66 Mile Trestle.
- As fishing season approaches, BC Parks is making sure folks are following the appropriate guidelines.
- Ben will be attending Cowichan River Day, joined by fellow rangers Daniel and Quinn.
- Katie is currently on leave, and will be back in March. Ardis is currently on holiday. For now, please reach out to Ben and Ardis as Katie's position is not yet backfilled.

### **Ernie Lea (Sidney Anglers)**

- This is Ernie's first meeting.
- Ernie has been a Vancouver Island resident all his life, and has always been involved in fishing/hunting. His favourite place to fish is the Cowichan River.
- Ernie is involved with Sidney Anglers, a group focused on raising money to give back to organizations. He is here today to see if there is opportunity for funding.

- Genevieve wondered: is there an angle to ask for funds for Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul next year?

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

- Very busy with Sta'lo' Skweyul
- Genevieve and Ken Elliott will be doing walks together in Garry oak habitat, with the help of funding from Federal Government Species at Risk Program, focused on Indigenous communities.
- Providing salmon interpretation program for Quw'utsun Secondary students' Environmental Stewardship Program and other classes with DFO staff, Hatchery staff, Siilh'na'mut Ken Elliott and Genevieve
- Cowichan Green community reached out regarding the CGC Agricultural Training Programme for a walk on agriculture and nature, Indigenous agriculture, restoration etc.
- Working on creating signage for plants for the Forest Discovery Centre.
- Visited Robinson's Sporting Goods to thank them for their generous support.

### **Quw'utsun' Sta'lo' Skweyul Planning 2025**

- Some changes: Unfortunately, John George will no longer be our speaker; thankfully, Philomena Williams suggested her son Stuart as a speaker, and we are grateful that he will be here. We learned that we will have a blanket to pin on the speaker as part of protocol (likely by Genevieve and Parker). The speaker will choose witnesses when opening the day.
- It will be up to Stuart whether he calls out Tzinquaw first. There will be opening remarks from Stuart, and then we will have our speakers come out.
- Help from Masters students have been offered during QSS.
- Confirmed speakers: Mayor Michelle Staples; Jim has suggested reaching out to Kate Segall (CVRD Chair/co-chair of CWB); Deborah Toporowski; Chief Cindy Daniels Cowichan Tribes; Jeff Kibble's staff member can attend at 1 pm.
- Ellery and Katie have created a printed programme for the day, a loose schedule laying out different events throughout the day including: Medicine Walk, River Seine, Nature Walk, Tzinquaw Dancing, Opening/Closing Table and Opening/Closing Day etc.
- Another change – it is highly unlikely that the fire ban will be lifted by Sunday, so we will not be able to have the Pi'qwun. Philomena and her cousin will be smoking salmon, but they cannot smoke all 20 salmon; looking for support baking. We are grateful to Cowichan Tribes for giving us 20 salmon.
- Looking for more apples; many are not yet ripe.
- Need home baked cookies.
- Reminder: gate opens at 7am, 8-9 setup for non-Indigenous Exhibitors, 9-9:30 for Indigenous setup.
- Katia is bringing 4 friends to help with the day.
- Bruce Coates will be available to help with setup.

- Accessible parking is available for Elders, anyone with a badge, or anyone self-describing as needing it
- Genevieve, Nava and Alyssa will be there at 7am; Parker will show up shortly after
- Public doesn't open until 10.
- Ben and co. can bring radios to help manage vehicles.
- Ben is to connect with Danno around where people can park.
- Unable to get a videographer. Frank Wall and Barry will be able to take photos.
- Site cleanup is on Friday.
- Thank you to Barry for making the hats & CSRT tablecloth, and Karen for organizing the handshake basket.
- Who can buy milk cream/sugar? Possibly Karen? Genevieve will bring tea.
- It is not clear if Jared is coming; Jared suggested we provide empty plate to discuss climate change, impact on river/fish.
- Thank you to CWB for honorariums.
- Genevieve reached out to SunFM and has done some other advertising; Parker will reach out to CBC.
- Alistair MacGregor will likely attend.
- Please bring high vis vests if you have them, and wear orange shirts if possible.
- Bring your own plate if you plan to eat.
- Label tents and tables! Is there some way to tell Domtar's apart?