

Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (CSRT) notes April 15, 2025

Attendance: Genevieve Singleton Co-chair, CSRT; Jim Deck, Cowichan Lake River Stewardship Society (CLRSS); Karen Deck, Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD); Joe Saysell, Friends of the Cowichan; Kim Lagimodiere, Program coordinator, Lulumexun, Cowichan Tribes (CT); Barry Hetschko, Volunteer; Colleen Terlein, Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (SMWS); Jill Thompson, Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB); Stephan Volker, concerned citizen; Christine Volker, concerned citizen.

Attending Online: Parker Jefferson, (CSRT); Sunny Mizushima, Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Implementation Coordinator; Bruce Coates, Nature Cowichan, Cowichan Land Trust (CLT); David Munday, Shawnigan Basin Society; Jennifer Shepherd, Xwulqw'selu Connections.

CSRT Business:

Regrets from Bethany Coulthard (CT), Sierra Harvey, Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre (CENC), Brian Houle, Catalyst Mill; Danni Paydli, (CWB); Tom Rutherford, (CWB); T'uwahwiye' Philomena Williams, elder; Elizabeth Aitken, CVRD Parks.

1. Genevieve thanked Danni Paydli and Karen Deck for taking notes last month. Notes were approved.
2. Appreciation to Jill, Karen, Jim, and Barry for the assistance for today's meeting.
3. Genevieve presented to Cowichan Tribes Natural Resources Committee last week regarding Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul (QSS) being an annual permanent event with Cowichan Tribes co-hosting at Black Bridge Beach. The meeting went very well and it was helpful that Bethany Coulthard provided assistance. The only concern raised, from a Council Member, is that World River's Day (September 28th in 2025), celebrated on the fourth Sunday of September, will be too close to National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30th. Further discussion in regards to QSS being officially co-hosted by CT and CSRT needs to go to Chief and Council. This meeting will be held next month for an official decision.

Post CSRT April 15 meeting info: Upon discussion with our Elder, T'uwahwiye' Philomena Williams, it was decided that out of respect for Quw'utsun Mustimuhw (Cowichan People) and others being involved in both events that the date for this year's event will be Sunday September 21 not fourth Sunday, Sept. 28.

4. Katie Mosewich and Ellery Jackson-Renz from the CVRD continue to assist Genevieve in producing a Google Spreadsheet with all QSS information to help the planning process going forward.

Upcoming Speakers

May 20 – Alexandra Morton is our zoom speaker! Will have a basket out for Honoria

June 15 - Sunny Mizushima, (DFO) - Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiatives (PSSI). Funding ends next year. Heather Wright might join to share local hatchery info.

July 15 - Stoltz Day Use Area picnic and field day

August - no meeting

September 16 - Catch up from summer and planning Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul

October 21 - Possibly kelp, also Knotweed

November 18 - Jennifer Moss - DFO restoration projects in Cowichan and surrounding watersheds

December 16 - Speaker TBA and holiday potluck

Round the Table

Joe Saysell, Friends of the Cowichan - thank goodness lake is full, lots of water. Joe wants to connect with Heather Wright (DFO) about Exeter and Tiny Creek. At Tiny Creek the spawning gravel has been filled in. Joe has money left over from the Haig Brown project to wheelbarrow in more gravel. At Exeter Creek the fry has hatched. Hopefully by the next meeting there will be more fry. Seems to be a good project so far. Land owner is very happy.

Lots of fish guide boats, up to 6 a day past his house. Spawning fish continue to be hit hard up there. Please keep writing letters of concern.

The steelhead run is almost extinct. Still fishing on the spawning beds all winter long. Almost nothing left but fisheries won't close the upper river. Numbers keep going down. Genevieve – would funding for signage be helpful. Joe – had signs up in 1993. Opened it in 1988. Realized the problem afterwards. Signs saying “this is a Redd – don't walk on it.” Vandalized and gone. Steelhead spawn on inside curve, where people walk. Once you wipe out a family of steelhead, they don't come back. Rickson's run is now gone. Anchors dragging, disturbs eggs. Predicts losing all fish in upper river.

Karen Deck, CVRD Area I Director, (Youbou) – Karen reported out re the Private Managed Forest Lands Action Alliance (PMFL AA). It is a group of groups who live on the E and N Land Grant lands which have become mainly privately managed forest lands. I am on the working group which is creating strategies to amplify our voices and efforts for the protection of watersheds, biodiversity, and access.

Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) is concerned that the 2019 review of Private Forest land regulations is stalled. Recommendations that have been given haven't been acted on. The rules governing private forestry are not sufficient. The resolution is that we want to see continued progress. Karen spoke to it at the AVICC meeting on the Saturday morning – passed unanimously. Will go from AVICC to the Union of BC Municipalities. Clear endorsement from all the coastal communities.

LAND USE

Cowichan Valley RD

R1) Addressing Local Community Concerns with Private Managed Forest Lands

Whereas population growth within the Cowichan Valley Regional District, like much of Vancouver Island, is concentrated in the fertile lower portions of our watersheds and is reliant upon surface and groundwater originating in the undeveloped upper watersheds;

And whereas while the entire Cowichan Valley Regional District lies on unceded First Nations territory, the majority of the land in the upper watersheds on eastern Vancouver Island is privately managed forest lands over which local governments have little or no authority regarding forest management activities which impact the hydrologic cycles and the availability of water to meet community and ecological needs:

Therefore be it resolved that AVICC request that the Province of BC and the Ministry of Forests complete the currently stalled Private Managed Forest Land Program Review and reform the *Private Managed Forest Lands Act* to ensure that forest management on private lands prioritizes the protection of ecological values while providing economic benefits to communities and allowing for local government input to resource harvesting activities within the watersheds that support their communities.

Sunny Mizushima, DFO -

Sunny will reach out to Joe Saysell re concerns with potential for future mud and gravel build up, and lack of spawning gravel available in Exeter Creek. DFO has a restoration biologist in the Exeter Creek area who may be able to provide guidance/support if required. (Update from Sunny 5/19: I've since contacted Joe and it sounds like Friends of Cowichan currently have the area under control, but are monitoring for any changes. I've asked Joe to reach out to me/DFO if the situation changes.)

Marking has started at Cowichan River Hatchery. A marking trailer is being trialed there to see if it would be feasible to utilize it for the hatchery's full production next year. The marking trailer is going to do roughly 200K fish, with the remaining 400K+ to be done by a contractor, as in years past. All fish raised at the hatchery receive a coded wire tag and an adipose fin clip prior to release. (Update from **Heather Wright**).

SEP Salmonid Enhancement Program Community Workshop to be held June 13-15 in Kamloops. Simpcw First Nation is hosting the 2025 Salmonid Enhancement Program (SEP) Community Workshop, scheduled to be held in Kamloops BC from June 13-15, 2025, at the unceded traditional territory of the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc.

Bruce Coates, Nature Cowichan - Thanks to Karen Deck for the Private land resolution news. Regional District of Nanaimo has also submitted a resolution. Bruce wrote a similar resolution that Genevieve will present on at the BC Nature AGM in Merrit on May 23.

A talk on the Native Bee Atlas will be held April 15 via Zoom. Hoping to have a family field trip to look at bees in the wild. April 17th showing in Vic of Safe Haven which is a film about an area of inland temp rainforest in Interior. Today is the last day to provide input to BC Timber Sales Review. Pacific Wild sent a notice with info encouraging everyone to send a letter.

Reminder to send events to Bruce or email cvns@naturecowichan.net for them to be added. Genevieve asked Bruce to please add the Roundtable meetings be added, but no meeting in August. All are welcome.

The Cowichan Agricultural Society had a panel discussion about water usage by farmers at Duncan United on Thursday 24th. There will be further meetings, Bruce will update at next CSRT meeting.

Jennifer Shepherd, Xwulqw'selu Connections - Exploring connections between groundwater and surface water and connections between community and water.

Carving a hand for the welcome figure. Christina Disney on leave till May; David working on a model -new results in the next month or so.

David Munday, Shawnigan Basin Society

- Busy! Bernie working on Community Land Trust with Barry Gates- has connections with Kensington that they are going to be managing.
- Seeking grants for milfoil removal – HCTF \$23K to map milfoil with Malahat Nation using drones and vegetation mapping; want to survey the lake. This is prep for 2nd grant application with EcoAction – Community Freshwater Action program. \$135K – surface supply divers with venturi suction equipment. Would establish the economics of milfoil removal. Biggest issue is that milfoil fragments will reproduce. Using cold water removal to get around that.
- Shawnigan Lake Cleanup April 26th with Rotary Eco Club.
- Unsworth fundraiser – May 28 – Silent Auction.
- Interested in private land forest regulations – interested to see the resolution.

Parker Jefferson, CSRT no report

Jim Deck, CLRSS The strategic plan for next 3-5 years is being refined for AGM in May, broom busting work party last weekend. On World Water Day – March 22 – 3 tours – 113 participants took tours. Survey – 60 respondents; 10 were from Lake, 35 from lake, 10 from Victoria and area. Impressive!

Invasive Species table at World Water Day event. Attracted new volunteers, members, sold swag. Should we be doing more little events like that?

Colleen Terlein, SMWS: Massive shipment of plants for restoration projects for Streamside Stewardship Partners program. Canvassing people who live along the water – Bings Creek currently. At the June AGM the Raptors Center will be the speaker.

Barry Hetschko

Birding with Cowichan Tribes at Cherry Point, Broom burning at Blackie's, building nestboxes for the marsh, Joe Saysell commented that he thinks there are less Swallows this year and that there are fewer insects on the river. When Dinsdale dike is removed, the Blackley dike will become important as a birdwatching trail. Hope to plant native plants and build a small viewing tower at end of dike led by Cowichan Estuary Restoration and Conservation Association (CERCA).

Jill Thompson, Cowichan Watershed Board

Koksilah LFWG Community Info night – May 5 – updates with special focus on understanding home water use – how to measure well volumes, how to care for water quality, Q&A

- Xwulqw'selu signs to be erected. Xwulqw'selu Watershed Plan Open House planned
- Weir, World Water Day – see Jim Deck's report.

Great meeting with Minister Neill at Quw'utsun Cultural Centre on Sunday March 30. Introducing the new Minister to 2 projects in 1 hour (tight time) – weir and estuary restoration project. Great support expressed by Minister Neill for the weir project. This was a pivotal moment for extending the dike removal permit.

Kim Lagimmodiere, S-hwuwha'us Thi'lut Kw'atl'kwa (Cowichan Tribes Thunderbird Protecting the Ocean) ... Thankful to still have funding!

Estuary project – 2-month extension of permit to remove the dyke. Root camp – education and sharing at the native plant nursery on that site. Under guidance of Jennifer Grenz, UBC. 100-150 participants over 3 days to help weed and learn. Elder T'uawahiye, Ken Elliot, teaching. Great!

Working with BCCF and PSF to monitor seals and sealions in the river, and log booms enable predator efficiency. June to March 5 sites monitoring plus drones. Info: Bottlenecks to Survival on PSF website.

European Green Crab monitoring since 2021 – so far only capturing indigenous shore crabs and fishes so ... so far so good! None detected.

Forage fish sand sampling – expanding from Kapali's to cover sites previously covered by Bruce. Clearwater, Kingscote, Kilpalis, ... Coastal Forage Fish network. Some eggs in the sand were herring eggs – eggciting!

2 hydrophone sites – Peter's Lane at Maple Bay ocean access. Base of Mt. Maxwell. Collecting acoustic info from the last year – disturbance by small vessels in spring and summer seasons. When are the Biggs orcas moving through there? Further info at Whalesound.ca

Derelict fishing boats in estuary. Cowichan Tribes marine team has been working hard on this issue. Guy Johnson organized a meeting too. Cowichan Tribes is even financially helping the vessel owner get it out of there – jurisdictional black hole. Lots of support from around the bay. But also, many other vessels sunk in the mud around there. Kim – wants to build on that collaboration from all those parties who care about it. 30+ sunken vessels in the bay – DFO won't do anything unless they are actively polluting. Big file recently.

Christine Volker – MNC results from recent by-election means that the Official Community Plan is likely to be challenged.

Stephan Volker – litigator on behalf of the environment in the US and still has a practice in Berkeley. He is interested in the Koksilah watershed – whole watershed approach – impacts on aquatic ecosystem. Christina and Stephan live in Canada and the USA. Retiring and happy to help up here. Genevieve – welcome the Volkerts!

Genevieve read out a report and request for action from **Guy Johnson, Fisherman.**

Thursday April 10th a community meeting organized by the Fishermen's wharf association was held to discuss the ongoing problem of derelict vessels washing up in the estuary and causing damage to this important part of the ecosystem.

The meeting was well attended representatives from: CVRD at various levels, North Cowichan Municipality, Cowichan Wooden Boat society, Cowichan Watershed board, Cowichan Naturalists, Cowichan Tribes, Cowichan Tribes members, CERCA, Pacific Industrial Marine, The Oceanfront Hotel, several marinas, and a number of local residents and concerned citizens.

The meeting went well, with the representatives from Cowichan Tribes able to share a wealth of information about the estuary and their efforts to deal with the derelict vessels. There was good discussion and an email was approved to be sent to the Minister of Fisheries and the Coast Guard. As well those attending is sending individual emails to the minister about the issue. There will be ongoing efforts to apply pressure to the federal government to deal with this threat to the ecosystem. I have attached the email that groups are sending to the Minister. It would be great if the round table was able to send their own email to the minister to add to the pressure. (the RT does not send letters)

Guy Johnston, Michelle Rose Fishing Community supported fishery

Genevieve read out the following report from: **Elizaeth Aitken, CVRD Parks** – regrets from Elizabeth update from the Parks & Trails Volunteer Program is that we've been out recently in Mill Bay Nature Park doing ivy removal with Brentwood College and members of the public as well as at Hecate Park weeding the native plant beds with Queen Margaret's School. We are also doing an Earth Day event at Trillium Park near Ladysmith on Tuesday April 22 from 10:30am-1:30pm working on ivy and other invasives with the public and Ladysmith Secondary with information from Firesmart BC being shared at the event. If anyone would like to join, they can sign up here: <https://www.cvrld.ca/275/Volunteering>. The event poster is also attached for good measure but don't worry about emailing it out to avoid cross-posting. Hoping you're all well and see you in May! Thanks, Elizabeth Aitken, CVRD Parks Volunteer Coordinator, E-mail: Elizabeth.Aitken@cvrd.bc.ca Tel: 250.746.2649

Report from **Brian Houle** – regrets but expects to start coming regularly for the next few months.

Report from Sierra Harvey, read out by Genevieve: Sierra Harvey has been hired as managing director for Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre. The Centre is open by volunteers, Thursdays and Fridays.

Estuary Camps hare highly recommended. Evolving vision for the centre. Restructuring for new energy and engagement. May 31 Open house,

Genevieve Singleton, CSRT co-chair, nature interpreter, passed around red flowing current branch with Luschiim's book

- Cowichan Bring Back the Bluebirds- 6 pairs returned. Very good start to the year. Someone saw a Mountain Bluebird Hulitun Tumuhw (Cowichan Estuary project)!
- 4 schools signed up for Salmon and Forest programs with Genevieve and Ken Elliott. Cowichan hatchery not actively open to the public, Salmon and the Forest Project, with Stehpanie Cottell's guidance has installed a great salmon interpretation sign there for school groups.
- Hulitun Tumhw, mentoring the UBC students in the estuary project through Jennifer Grenz and Cowichan Tribes. A lot of weeding but also great community network building. Very moved to be part of that project.

Kim – Cowichan Tribes Open House - May 21. Will follow up on invitations.

Jill – April CWB meeting cancelled due to conflict with a Cowichan Tribes meeting.

