

Cowichan Watershed Board – Province of British Columbia

Local Governance Initiative

Briefing Note– February 14 Meeting – Ministers Thomson, Polack & CWB Co-Chairs Seymour, Lefebure

Prepared for: Cowichan Watershed Board Members

Prepared by: Tom Rutherford, CWB Executive Director

Background

- In 2014 the Province of British Columbia invited, and funded, the Cowichan Watershed Board to submit a proposal for a pilot project to explore the development of tools under the Water Sustainability Act that would support a co-governance model for water and watershed stewardship in the Cowichan Valley
- This proposal was completed, vetted by the Cowichan Watershed Board, Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD and presented to MOE and FLNRO senior staff at a meeting in Cowichan Tribes Chief and Council Chambers November 8, 2016 .
- The proposal and covering correspondence signed by the CWB Co-Chairs was forwarded directly to Ministers Polack and Thomson on Nov. 9, 2016
- A meeting between the CWB Co-chairs and Ministers Thomson and Polack to discuss the proposal for a pilot partnership was scheduled for February 14, 2017

Meeting Summary

- Details
 - Held in Minister Thomson’s Office at Legislature
 - Morning of “Speech from the Throne”
 - Scheduled for 30 minutes – extended to 45
- In attendance:
 - Province of British Columbia
 - The Honorable Mary Polack, Minister of Environment
 - The Honorable Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
 - Kaaren Lewis, ADM, Environmental Sustainability and Strategic Policy Division, MOE
 - Craig Sutherland, ADM, Regional Operations Division, Coast Area, FLNRO
 - Lynn Kriwoken, Executive Director, Water Protection and Sustainability, MOE
 - Ward Trotter, Executive Director, Natural Resources, FLNRO
 - 2 Aides
 - Cowichan Watershed Board
 - Chief William “Chip” Seymour
 - Mayor Jon Lefebure
 - Tom Rutherford
- Chief Seymour and Mayor Lefebure spoke to the strengths of the proposal and the Cowichan Watershed Board as a pilot for a local water governance partnership under the *Water Sustainability Act*. Key points included:

- CWB Partnership approach
- Strong track record of demonstrating success
- Support for incremental approach to developing co-governance tools
- The ability of CWB to help Province of BC to demonstrate success...
- Minister Thomson informed CWB representatives that the Nicola Valley had been selected for the single pilot initiative that would be supported at this time
- Ministers indicated that pilot initiative was designed to bring communities up to the level of effectiveness that was already being demonstrated by Cowichan Watershed Board
- Chief Seymour commented that being “over-qualified” was a unique experience....
- Both Ministers commented on the many accomplishments of the CWB and of the excellent work done by the Board to date.
- Minister Thompson committed to directing staff to work with CWB to implement some of the elements in the proposal even though a “full pilot” was not being supported at this time.
- Both Ministers acknowledged the good work of the WB and re-iterated that the board was “ahead of the curve”

Discussion & Analysis

- Full “pilot status” was not supported but support was indicated for engaging with MOE/FLNRO senior staff to work towards developing some elements of the proposal
- This approach works well for us as it allows for progress on the local governance file in a measured way that allows CWB to develop capacity, support and a level of comfort from all participants as we move forward
- An incremental approach will also allow us to develop lines of funding to increase our capacity to engage without jeopardizing our other immediate priorities: sustainable flows, outreach & education and support to our technical working groups
- Suggested elements of CWB co-governance proposal to be pursued for implantation with the Province of British Columbia:
 - Initiation of a structured discussion regarding the establishment of a formal advisory board to specifically inform statutory decision makers on provincial ground and surface water licensing and works in and about a stream as outlined in sections 115 and 126 of the Water Sustainability Act (WSA).
 - Assistance with developing critical, environmental and other (cultural, recreational, industrial etc.) flow objectives, thresholds and triggers to ensure the protection of fish populations and watershed function especially during drought conditions.
 - Engagement in a comprehensive long term drought management planning exercise which may lead to the development and use of key tools as defined in the WSA such as area based regulations.
- Conversations with Sr. Provincial MOE and FLNRO staff should be pursued to develop a framework for explore developing these co-governance tools for the Cowichan Valley
- A strategic approach might be to move forward with the concept of setting up an “advisory board” that would interact directly with Provincial decision makers across a broad scope of issues including all of those itemized above and more (flows, drought management, licensing, works in and around streams, CEMP etc.)

- This approach would allow the CWB to provide a local perspective (and engage local expertise) across a range of issues affecting the Cowichan Watershed
- The Advisory board could be comprised of CWB members/community leaders and supported technically by the CWB TAC.
- This incremental approach might provide the CWB with the most influence across a range of significant processes.

Recommended Action

- Letter be drafted and sent to Ministers Thomson and Polack thanking them for the opportunity to meet and indicating that the CWB would like to begin discussions on implementing elements of our co-governance proposal.
 - **DONE** – Letter sent to Ministers February 20, copy included in CWB members package, February 27 Board meeting
- Tom Rutherford to follow up with Sr. MOE/FLNRO staff to schedule initial meeting to discuss a process for moving forward
 - Suggested that preliminary meeting be limited to staff but that for subsequent working meetings CWB send a small team including staff, CWB and TAC members.
- CWB staff pursue funding partnership with external partners to provide resources to pursue this initiative so as not to draw from core funding.
- CWB staff work to schedule a follow up meeting between FLNRO and MOE Ministers and CWB co-chairs in September to follow up and discuss progress on this initiative