

# Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable



Oct 15, 2015  
**MINUTES**

The meeting was called to order by Genevieve Singleton at 9 am.

## **In attendance**

Meg Loop (CLT), Keith Lawrence (CVRD), Geoff Strong (CERCA), Paul Rickard, Parker Jefferson (One Cowichan), Ian Morrison (CVRD Area F), Eric Marshall (CVNS), Carol Hartwig, Don Closson (BC Parks), Shaun Chadburn (North Cowichan), Genevieve Singleton (Nature interpreter), Ray Demarchi, Jean Atkinson (CLRSS), Diana Gunderson (CLRSS), Barry Hetschko (SMWS), Martha Lescher (water quality monitor and fish salvager) Ken Clements (Sidney Anglers), Tim Kulchyski (Cowichan Tribes), Rob James (Western Stevedoring), Ron Diederichs (Forestry, Lands, Natural Resources Operations Ministry and Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Programme), Tom Rutherford (DFO), Shawn Kerr (DFO), Swarn Leung (Cowichan Station Area Association), Bob Crandall (Cowichan Lake Salmonid Enhancement Society). Kerry Davis (CVRD), Derek Haupt (Western Forest Products), Brian Nielsen (Western Forest Products), Loren Duncan, Wayne Haddow (BC Agriculture), Susan Down, Ted Brookman (BCWF).

Regrets: Dave Lindsay, Deborah Toporowski, Goetz Schuerholz

## **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the September meeting were circulated and approved.

## **Roundtable updates**

Parker Jefferson, One Cowichan- The “get out the vote” campaign is going very well.

Geoff Strong, CERCA – Fundraising gala went very well. Planning for Nature Trail along the Wescan Terminal is on hold waiting decision on sewage outlet positioning.

Ray Demarchi – 331 seals two years ago, 139 yesterday.

Jean Atkinson – Thank you to Sidney Anglers for their donations towards fry salvage.

AGM on Sunday, Planting Party on Saturday at Saywell Park.

Sidney Anglers- \$13,000 passed out to stewardship groups.

Tom Rutherford – Met with Ted to revisit a Vessel Operator Restriction, keep vessels out of the eelgrass area. Now a legislated thing to actually implement, such as buoys. Next Feb hosting the Community Research meeting, engineers, biologists, CAs will be meeting for 3

days in the Valley. Part of this meeting will be a tour, focusing on the lower river. Shawn Kerr, new Community Advisor for the region, was introduced. Welcome Shawn!

Ian Morrison – Passed the creation of a watershed management function, passed the AAP closing day for consent to proceed with it. Legal entity to receive funds such as grants for weirs, but also legally able to expend public funds. There will be an alternative approval process, has to go through all the associated areas. Next time a big grant is announced, the CVRD is in a legal position to apply.

Brian Houle's Report presented by Genevieve- Special permission to operate above rule curve, way too much water in the lake according to the rule curve. Gates are fully open, at about 30cms right now, more rainfall expected over the next weekend,

DFO Updates:  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the salmon have entered the system. 2371 chinook adults, 1335 jacks (run is dropping off), 78 coho adults, 76 coho jacks (will continue to enter the system until January), 250 pinks, 7 chum (very beginning of the run). Broodstock, around 400 chinook accomplished within a weekend around water levels and Catalyst allowing the flow to decrease for the take. About 800,000 eggs will be taken, aim for 700,000 fry. Fence went in a bit late and will be coming out a bit early, may have missed about 5% of the run counting. Bob Crandall – Huge thank you to Sidney Anglers for cheque, for broodstock and hatchery. Some DNA fry sampling. Found chinook in 3 different streams, 78 of the 155 samples sent in. So far 70 chinook and 8 coho. DNA looks like fall run, some groups look like Puntledge and Nanaimo. None were summer or share any genetic similarity to summer run Nanaimo. Most fish look like fall run for southern Vancouver Island.

Kerry Davis – re The Malahat LNG proposal, on Sat there was a 100 person paddling protest.

Barry Hetschko, Somenos Marsh Society – Tonight is the Red Umbrella Event, 5:30-9 art walk with downtown businesses. Somenos Marsh Wild wings event 8-10 at Just Jakes live band and art show. Wild Wings Family Fun day went well; over 30 kids entered the contest. Eric Marshall – Shorebird count took place, dry run of the Great Goose chase for when the swans arrive soon.

Keith Lawrence – Working on fish habitat mapping, trying to first identify all the data sets, what format the data sets are in, then bring all into a GIS system to be updated and kept current. Malahat to Yellow Point watershed grouping, understand where we need to focus efforts. Airshed Protection planning, continue to have meetings with local municipalities. Invasive Plants bi-law is part of a broader program around regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. 2 years developed a prioritized ranking of what key plants are in the region (ie knotweed and giant hogweed), education and social marketing to change behaviours around plants, and a bi-law focusses on giant hogweed to pilot the process, looking to expand in years forward.

Cheri Ayers – Back on the chinook report, meetings and workshops in Jan to revisit the critical limiting factors from March 2013, bridge into the action plan. Koksilah slowly coming up, still a little low flow, not seeing a lot of fish yet. A dead pitch to have carcass numeration to help gauge the escapement numbers used in concert with fence data.

Tim Kulchyski – Looking at DFO reports from 1923 and 1949 and a lot of what they talk about are the same fears and challenges faced now. Earlier this season CT were doing swims in upper part of the system, as of Sept moved to the lower end and incoming fish. Swims open up questions, lots of seal predation. Harold Joe identified key predation sites in the lower river and tide heights and put information to it. Tend to get seals that

specialize on eating adult salmon in the system. Tribes hired BCCF to download all the data loggers for the whole system. Sandy Pools saw at one point a temperature of 26 degrees. The lower sections were seeing huge long open places, what are the fish in the system, how are they by the time they get there. Early fall swims turned up a lot of dark chinook, wasn't until the flows increased did we see shiny chinook just in from the ocean.

## **Business**

### **Nature Cowichan presentation– John Scull, notes provided by John**

#### History

- The Nature Cowichan Network was created in 2007 by the Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society as a service for the local conservation community.
- The original members were CVNS, the Cowichan Land Trust, and the Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society.
- The original concept for Nature Cowichan was to be something like a “United Way” for Nature. It included rack cards for local distribution and a system for point-of-sale donations at local tourist-oriented businesses.
- To support this collective fund raising effort we wanted to have a website (and later a Facebook page) as a portal for local environmental groups and to provide a source of information for tourists and residents. There was discussion of having advertising on the website.

#### Legal

The domain name, logo, and the business name “Nature Cowichan” are held by the Cowichan Valley Naturalists. The Nature Cowichan logo was approved by the CVRD as part of the Cowichan brand. CVNS maintains a fund in their books for donations and expenses related to Nature Cowichan. Were there ever a large surplus, the funds would be distributed to the member organizations.

All the members of Nature Cowichan are registered charities. CVNS and Canada Helps issue tax receipts for donations to Nature Cowichan. Some structural changes would be required if there was a desire to share donations with non-charities.

#### Current situation

- The website and Facebook page are doing OK. The website averages about 600 visits per month. In the Spring and Summer it gets about 5 inquiries per month.
- The Facebook page has 227 followers and one recent post reached 286 viewers.
- Bicycling, hiking, reading the blog, and linking to member websites are the four most popular pages on the website.

While the online presence of Nature Cowichan has been a modest success, the fund raising initiative and participation by member groups have been disappointing.

- The people who were spearheading the connection with tourist businesses moved away from the community and nobody took their place.

- Each member organization was to have a person enter their events on the website/facebook calendar and announce their events on the Facebook page. For the most part this has not happened.
- Each member organization has been asked to have a member on the Nature Cowichan management committee. Participation has been inconsistent.
- Member organizations have been invited to contribute blogs, but only the Cowichan Valley Naturalists have done so.
- I have maintained the website and Facebook page (but not the calendars or blog). It would be great to have more content contributed by the members.

#### Futures

1. John stated that he would continue along with the website and facebook pages until he quits.
2. Increase participation by members both in contributing content and participating in decision-making.
3. Revive the original fund raising initiative.

**Dinsdale Farm –Presentation-- The following is a summary, provided by Paul Rickard, Ray Demarchi and Carol Hartwig, of concerns outlined in the power point presentation:**

1. Diking of the Dinsdale property has eliminated the tidal influence on a large portion of the property thus eliminating tidal habitats for fish and wildlife and eliminating the tidal hydrological function.
2. Channelization and armoring of the banks along the south and middle arms of the Koksilah River has eliminated side-channels and habitats important for salmon rearing
3. Dike maintenance that removed trees and shrubs on the dikes and river banks has eliminated important habitats and hanging vegetation for temperature control and insect production.
4. Diking shrinks flood plain and exacerbates flooding of upstream areas including Clem-Clem Village, Cowichan Bay Road and Cowichan Bay Tennis Courts.
5. Intensive monoculture of agricultural crops on the property has caused a loss of riparian biodiversity
6. Heavy application of livestock manure risks E. coli infection of estuary (contrary to the Cowichan Watershed Board’s 2020 target for edible shellfish) and air pollution from animal waste aerosols.
7. Ponding of fresh water produces ideal habitat for mosquitoes and increases the risk of West Nile virus which since 1999 has rapidly expanded its range across North America into BC.

Advice from fish biologists is to look to the lower river for increasing fish resources. A lot of rebuilding work and investigation going forward. This information can invest into regions with high impact potential. We have the Cowichan Estuary Management Plan giving legal precedent, including review. About 90 species of birds that visit the Cowichan estuary that

depend on the movement of tidal waters. We know that 80% of smolt diet is terrestrial insects to get ready to head to the ocean.

Dialogue:

Ron Diederichs, Years ago adjacent properties returned to conservation focus use and restoration. Much work has gone on by the partners.

Wayne Haddow: All of the Dinsdale farm property lies within the Agricultural land reserve. The agricultural Land Commission was concerned with the conversion of the parcel lying on the east side of the north arm of the Koksilah River, to wildlife habitat alone. There will need to be consultation with the ALC as plans for changes to the Dinsdale property progress. Canada geese are a major problem for grazing new seedlings and damage to newly planted or germinated corn. Views the visitation by resident geese as a good thing to attract geese away from other farmland.

Dave Aldcroft: Hunting has been allowed on the property and could be distributing the swans and geese out of the property onto other farms. Cowichan Valley Naturalists are very concerned with discussion of mosquito eradication, use of insecticides and roundup use in terms of doing damage to surrounding ecosystem.

Tom Rutherford: Maybe would be a good idea to have FLNRO, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited and Nature Trust share information to the Cowichan community and get a full look at the background and history, and how to go forward with management. Cowichan Tribes must be a key party to the discussion.

Tim Kulchyski: Good communication is everything. From Cowichan Tribe's perspective, we see many distinct and broad challenges for the area. Other bordering properties have been hugely challenging to the fisheries values. A few small side channels being filled have had significant impacts in regards to floods. Critically important to facilitating estuary braiding. So much habitat and side channels have been lost in the lower river; any opportunity to put back complexity needs to be taken.

At the end of the presentation regarding Dinsdale Farm the following letters were passed around in hard copy. This was not distributed earlier due to a request from Paul, Ray and Carol that it this be held back till after their presentation.

*September 25, 2015*

*Dear Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Members, Thank you for the opportunity to attend the September 17th Roundtable meeting. I found the session to be very informative and am impressed with the level of commitment so many of you have with regards to the health of the Cowichan watershed, including the Koksilah. I found Wayne Haddow's presentation on the value of agricultural lands to be particularly informative considering the challenges many communities face with on-going development pressures on agricultural land and the need to ensure farmland and water resources are protected for future generations.*

*With regards to the discussion about Dinsdale Farm and The Nature Trust of British Columbia, I feel it is important to provide additional information to the group prior to your October 15th meeting. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations holds a long term lease on the property and is an active partner in the management of the farm via the Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program (VICLMP)<sup>[1]</sup>. As a regional program we collaboratively work together to acquire and manage lands throughout Vancouver Island, the Central Coast and Haida Gwaii; to date we have secured over 100 conservation areas totalling more than 11,000ha many of which are coastal wetlands and estuaries. A steering committee made up of representatives of each partner organization helps direct the work of our conservation land manager who in turn implements management, restoration, and enhancement plans on the conservation lands including Dinsdale Farm.*

*Dinsdale Farm is part of the conservation land holdings in the Cowichan estuary, some of which have been restored to intertidal marsh, and some are farmed and provide winter forage for migrating waterfowl. Other elements have also been encouraged for other wildlife (hedgerows for songbirds and riparian forest for fish and bird species). Dinsdale provides a wildlife-friendly agricultural component of the mosaic of lands in the lower Cowichan (residential, recreational, other farms managed in different ways, riparian areas, intertidal lands). I believe that enhanced practices could be encouraged in many ways on adjacent lands to complement the marsh and farm properties managed by the VICLMP so that certain issues (e.g. mosquitos) are addressed in a systematic way.*

*Just to put the appended e-mail (August 25<sup>th</sup>) into context, our conservation land manager recently responded on behalf of the program to some concerns that were raised via the Ministry of Agriculture with regards to the management of Dinsdale Farm (this response is provided below). The VICLMP partners have reviewed this response and are confident that it addresses the concerns that were raised, accurately reflects our management objectives/goals, and highlights the unique nature of our partnership and how we strive to balance multiple uses and mandates while acting as good stewards of the water and land. I would encourage everyone to review the website links that our land manager provided in his August 25<sup>th</sup> e-mail for information on how the management of the farm is assisting us in meeting many important conservation objectives and to also visit the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust website <http://www.deltafarmland.ca/> for information on farm management for wildlife purposes.*

*Further to the information in the August 25<sup>th</sup> e-mail below, and public concerns with regards to crop types on the farm itself, I note that as part of the annual crop management cycle in our farm agreement, we have recently seeded a cover crop of winter wheat and Italian ryegrass for waterfowl and soil conservation purposes. Folks accessing the dike system for hiking and waterfowling should soon see new shoots that will sustain ducks and geese this winter.*

*As a program, we are greatly encouraged by the level of engagement and interest in the management of our conservation lands by your group, and by the CSRT's and the Cowichan Watershed Board's on-going commitment to sustaining the Cowichan Valley environment.*

[1] VICLMP partners: Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), The Nature Trust of British Columbia (TNTBC), Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO), Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada (CWS)

*Sincerely, Ron Diederichs  
Section Head, Ecosystems Section  
Ministry of FLNR, 2080A Labieux Road, Nanaimo, BC V9T 6J9 Ph: [250-751-3223](tel:250-751-3223) Fax: [250-751-3208](tel:250-751-3208)*

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August 25th, 2015, File: 39570/20 CODI, Sent via Email

Dear Ray, Rodger, Goetz, Genevieve and Lori,

**Re: Management of Dinsdale Farm Conservation Area (Cowichan Estuary)**

*I am writing this letter to respond to the concerns regarding the management of Dinsdale Farm property in the Cowichan Estuary (owned by The Nature Trust of British Columbia and Ducks Unlimited Canada and secured as part of the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program - PECP). This property is managed by the Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program and includes the partners identified below (many of which are cc'd here); all of which are also founding and active members of the PECP.*

*The Dinsdale Farm property is an active farm and is managed to provide habitat to migratory and wintering waterfowl, Avian Insectivores, raptors, owls and shorebird species and, to continue to produce high quality food/crops for our local farmer. The activities on the farm support our partner's goals as members of the Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture ([www.pacificbirds.org](http://www.pacificbirds.org)), as signatories to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP); supports the goals for herbaceous habitat of the Bird Conservation Strategy for the Northern Pacific Rainforest Region (<http://www.ec.gc.ca/mbc-com/DF49C9A5-E2A7-466F-B06C-2DF69B0E0664/BCR-5-PYR-FINAL-Feb-2013.pdf>); and finally, support the goals and management objectives of the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan. In addition to meeting many environmental and species goals and objectives, the on-going operation/management of Dinsdale Farm also contributes to achieving the stated agricultural objectives of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) for farm land and food security.*

*Since the 1980's the partners of the VI CLMP have invested a significant amount of resources to enhance this property for wildlife, farm management and compatible recreational purposes.*

*This has included:*

- *The breaching of dike systems off of Westcan terminal road and working with BC Hydro to bury power lines along the road to limit bird strikes.*
- *The construction of field swales to enhance the capacity of the property to "pond" water over the winter migratory season.*
- *The construction of wetlands to provide further habitat complexity for the property AND, to act as natural filtration system for any surface water run off coming from the fields.*
- *The installation of a water control structure that allows us to manage/manipulate the water levels on the property as well as any discharges from the property itself. Any run off must go through the constructed wetlands before being discharged from the property.*

- *On-going enhancement of hedgerow habitat both on the fringe of the farm property, within the constructed wetlands themselves, around the irrigation pond, and on the dike itself. This has also included the installation of nest boxes.*
- *Working with the CVRD to create a community park at the Maple Grove to protect the historic maples as well as to provide the public with a parking area and walking path out to the dike.*
- *Maintenance work on the diking system itself in order to meet our obligations under the Dike Maintenance Act as well as the Occupiers Liability Act for public purposes (e.g. walking, bird watching, retriever trials, hunting).*
- *Installation of interpretive signage outlining the significance of the area for wildlife as well as agriculture along with the construction of a viewing platform to provide wildlife viewing/interpretation opportunities.*
- *Working with our partners to provide targeted Goose hunts on the property to support initiatives that aim to reduce the impact of geese on the Cowichan Estuary and adjacent/regional farmlands.*
- *On-going support for local conservation initiatives.*

*Much of the PECP/VICLMP partners' conservation and restoration activities on the farm and the greater Cowichan Estuary as well as the linkages to the CEEMP process can be found in Rodger's 2005 report, "A review of the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan" (<http://www.naturecowichan.net/Cowichan%20Estuary%20Plan%20Review%20Final%20Report.pdf>) section 5.1.1.*

*Since our acquisition of the property, coupled with our on-going enhancement/management efforts, we have conducted on-going inventory/monitoring work to gauge the effectiveness of our management actions in terms of bird use days, bird density, species diversity, and invasive vs native species cover on the property itself. The results of this work has shown that since our acquisition and active management of the farm property we have increased the bird use days, density, and overall native flora and fauna diversity on the property.*

*With regards to our farm operations we have been working with the same family on the site for over 20 years. As mentioned above this is an active farm that needs to produce both quality crops for our operator as well as quality winter cover crops/forage with high nutritive value(e.g. corn, oats, fall/winter rye, barley, and forage grass crops) to meet the bio-energetic needs of migrating and wintering waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway; thus contributing to the Pacific Birds Habitat JV and NAWMP goals.*

*TNTBC has a long term lease arrangement with this family that stipulates the time of year for access, crop rotations, crop/field inspections, agricultural inputs (e.g. manure, fertilizers) as well as annual planning meetings; much of which is based on the Environmental Farm Planning Guide found at:*

*[http://www.aqf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/EnviroFarmPlanning/EFP\\_Refguide/Refguide\\_toc.htm](http://www.aqf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/EnviroFarmPlanning/EFP_Refguide/Refguide_toc.htm). In addition we regularly engage with Wayne Haddow (Ministry of Agriculture) to discuss the property and its agricultural management.*

*The immediate concern/complaint regarding manure spreading was discussed on site with the Ministry of Agriculture on August 13<sup>th</sup>. While we will be working with our operator to implement practices to limit the smell generated from future applications and to maximize the retention of nutrients from the manure in the soil (e.g. tilling and irrigation), the present method and timing of application of manure itself has been confirmed to follow accepted agricultural practice, is within the terms of the lease, and follows the manure management advisories found at <http://farmwest.com/advisories> in terms of time of year and weather. As discussed above, improvements over the years have ensured that the farm is a closed system in that any runoff must flow through the constructed wetlands, where biological processes improve the water quality before it enters the estuary. In addition to the constructed wetlands much of the property remains in a cover crop which further contributes to nutrient cycling and prevents soil erosion.*

*There have also been statements, without the provision of any data, indicating that our farm practices are contributing to nutrient loading and/or the faecal coliform levels found within the estuary itself. If there is data to suggest that the operation of Dinsdale Farm is contributing to the nutrient/coliform load within the estuary I would appreciate it be forwarded on to us for review. If there is solid evidence to suggest this is the case, we will take all reasonable steps in working with our farmer to address the situation. The VICLMP supports the efforts of the Cowichan Watershed Board in achieving their Estuary Health Target (<http://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/content/estuary-health-target>) and want to ensure that we are not contributing to the on-going challenges of water quality in the estuary.*

*In response to the comment regarding mosquito management on the property in relation to the nuisance to users of the Cowichan Bay Golf and Country Club. As relayed over the years to both the Regional District and the managers of the Golf Course and others, the land management policy for our conservation lands is as follows:*

- 1) Control of mosquitoes in a wetland/conservation area should be approved for health and safety reasons and not for public nuisance. (Note: as indicated above one of the objectives of the conservation area is to provide habitat for Avian Insectivores of which mosquitoes are a critical food source); and,*
- 2) Where a Medical Health Officer has identified a mosquito population within a conservation area and has determined that there is a risk to public health from transmission of West Nile virus from mosquitoes to humans, VICLMP will work with VIHA to explore necessary mosquito population control measures.*

*The Cowichan Estuary remains a top conservation, enhancement and restoration priority for all of the partners of the VICLMP. To date we have successfully secured over 300ha of critical fish and wildlife habitat and remain committed to meaningfully and respectfully working with our many community stakeholders and industry in achieving our collective local, regional and international management goals for the Cowichan Estuary.*

*Sincerely,*

**Thomas Reid, Manager**

*Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program*

*2080 Labieux Road, Nanaimo BC V9T 6J9*

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*Partners in Conservation*

[1] VICLMP partners: Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), The Nature Trust of British Columbia (TNTBC), Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO), Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada (CWS)

**Next meeting for CSRT is Nov. 19, 9-12 at the old Freshwater Ecocentre, Wharnccliffe Road, Duncan**