

Cowichan Watershed Board Flows and Fish Working Group Meeting Notes

Date of Meeting: Thursday February 12, 2015

Time: 9:00 -12:00

Location: -Cowichan Tribes Chief and Council Chambers

Chair: Mayor Ross Forrest

1. *Welcome/Introduction* – The Chair led introductions and noted that Agenda Item 3 may have to be switched with Item 4 due to presenter availability.
2. *Lake Level/Flows Contingency Planning for 2015* - Brian Houle of Catalyst gave a presentation attached. Brian described Catalyst's water licenses and related discussions that occur annually as well as how water was managed in 2014 with little action being taken in the spring and how subsequently despite significantly reduced summer flows, there was no capacity for fish pulses.
He noted that similar to the 2013/14 winter snow pack is low. MFLNRO has examined the 1998 season and Larry Barr of the Naniamo office has developed a proposal that would see reduced flows below the normal 25 cms and 15cms late spring and early summer. He also proposed increasing fall flows.

Action Item: Brian Houle will work with a small group composed of representatives from BCCF, MFLNRO, Cowichan Tribes, DFO and Catalyst and others as appropriate to develop a strategy for 2015 flows by April 1st.

3. *Consideration of Options for Ensuring Adequate flows in the Cowichan River.*
Kate Miller reviewed a the Multiple Accounts Analysis Table that had been provided to group members including seven options related to assuring adequate summer and autumn flows in the Cowichan River. The CVRD plans to apply for Gas Tax funding to do more detailed engineering planning, a preliminary cost assessment and environmental impact analyses related to increased storage at Cowichan Lake as well as determining the costs associated with constructing works. Due date for the application is April 15th. The CVRD also intends to prepare an application for storage. Dr. Hamid Hatami will be leading the process on behalf of the CVRD.

Kate noted that as part of the project the CVRD requested that KWL put together a digital library associated with the issue. That library will be posted on the website.

Working Group members were invited to comment on the table at the meeting. Kate noted that First Nations impacts are not discussed in the table as direct consultation is important. In addition, government impacts and benefits need to be discussed directly with various agencies.

A number of comments and questions were offered by Working Group members. Some of these are summarized below.

- There will likely only be one chance at raising the weir in the near future so we should pursue the most reasonable option that offers the most water.
- What actually are the impacts to lakeshore properties?
- Need to consider views of lakeshore residents who want more water as well as those that oppose it.
- Concern was expressed that the table was be too complicated and some comparisons were not “apples to apples” in nature.
- We need to consider minimum flow requirements for fish species –may be lower that we think.
- We need to strive to achieve optimal flows for fish species not minimal flows for species.
- Different return periods should take future climate change into account including IPCC anticipated and worst case scenarios.
- Need to define what some of the underlying values are in matrix. Rank criteria based on supported values, and how to balance biological needs versus economic and public enjoyment needs.
- We should be asking:
 - how much does the weir need to be raised to address a catastrophic (extreme low water) year and
 - identify the risks associated with a series of lower weir heights and consider the trade offs.
- We need to know critical temperatures and associated water levels for fish.
- We need to know the impact of lake level changes on the red listed (‘Cowichan’ lamprey).

- Flood management issues associated with dredging options would be a concern to Cowichan people if the River became flashier as predicted.
- Need to look at Marie Canyon to determine flows required to address seasonal fish migration barrier there.
- The IPPC findings and recommendations, Lake Powell, and the drying of the west all bolster the argument for water storage.

Decisions/Action Items:

- *Members should submit additional comments to Dr. Hatami at hhatami@cvrld.bc.ca*
- *The digital library mentioned above will be placed on the Cowichan Watershed Board website when it is available.*

4. *Cowichan Chinook Recovery Strategy and Chinook Target*

Cheri Ayers, Cowichan Tribes/DFO made a presentation ([see link - http://tinyurl.com/pwlxzd9](http://tinyurl.com/pwlxzd9)) regarding the Chinook Recovery project. The purpose of the presentation was to determine:

- if the project is on the right track;
- solicit comments of materials that have been prepared to date; and,
- encourage people to join work groups to pursue action plans.

Barriers to salmon success are wide ranging and therefore Cheri's work is designed to pursue an integrated watershed approach with Chinook as an indicator of watershed health. Cheri asked the question -can we have one vision for watershed health?

She proposed a holistic approach. The project is presented in 4 volumes. The first and fourth volumes are available for comment; work continues on volumes 2 and 3.

Although the question was not asked directly it appeared that there was general agreement amongst working group members that the project is on the right track. A few suggestions were made including:

- the need to address the responsibility/accountability gap between provincial control and local and other impacts related to river flows (shared responsibility).

- the concept of “normative” should be moved up out the footnote where it resides – normative flows and normative biodiversity are also concepts we should include

Four action groups were proposed including:

- Management Action Group;
- Stewardship Action Group;
- Research and Monitoring Group; and,
- Community Outreach and Awareness Action Group.

Actions requested:

- Working Group members were requested to submit comments on Volume 1 <http://tinyurl.com/ptnu8dm> and volume 4 <http://tinyurl.com/o7g5etn> to Cheri.
- Anyone interested on participating on one of the above groups is also requested to contact Cheri.

5. *Other Issues -Next Meeting March 12, 2015 at Cowichan Tribes.*