

# PATHWAYS AND PARTNERSHIPS

A FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION AND RECONCILIATION IN THE COWICHAN WATERSHED

SEPTEMBER 2018



*Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa':*

*We come together as a whole to work together  
to be stronger as partners for the watershed.*



This report emerged from the Cowichan Watershed Co-Governance Conversations, a series of workshops held in 2017-2018 involving key elected officials and senior staff from Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD.

Funding for this project was provided by BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative, a project of Tides Canada Initiatives.

Cowichan Watershed Board Co-Chairs, Mayor Jon Lefebure and Chief William Seymour.

# WELCOME FROM OUR CO-CHAIRS

Partnerships are so important.

They build trust and understanding, which can open closed doors. They build mutual respect between neighbours, which has ripple effects into other areas.

Cowichan Tribes has been a partner in the Cowichan Watershed Board for the past eight years, co-chairing with Cowichan Valley Regional District. One of our core principles is expressed in our language: Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa, which means "We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed."

Watershed Board meetings provide a forum for learning from each other, and for sharing both the concerns Cowichan Tribes has regarding the watershed, as well as work we are conducting on behalf of the watershed with other local government representatives, and stakeholders.

We are collaborating to promote watershed health with all levels of local government. This is very important in facing the changes that will occur with climate change, especially for the health of our salmon populations, the security of our drinking water supply and increasing effects of flooding.

Nobody is in the same boat as us, but we are all better off working together. When we go in partnership, people listen.

With respect,  
**Chief William Seymour**  
*Chief of Cowichan Tribes*

Uy' skweyul. (Good day.)

At the Cowichan Watershed Board, with the full support of the CVRD Board and North Cowichan Council, we have worked hard to build trust with the First Nations whose Traditional Territory we share, through a mutual concern over the health of our watersheds. At the Regional District level, the Board has supported the work of the Cultural Connections Program to bring our communities together and advance Truth and Reconciliation. That requires facing the truth of how terribly First Nations have been treated in our country and the crippling impacts of a colonization that attacked every part of a traditional life and culture.

At a recent gathering of Elders from across the Province, Cowichan Tribes adopted the motto "We are still here". We have an opportunity today to work with First Nations as they rebuild their culture in a modern world. Their success will be our success as a community as we deal with the difficult issues – affordable housing, climate change, water protection, addiction etc. – that face all of us.

Relationship-building takes time and sincere commitment, something I hope we can all commit to, as we create a community together. The Hul'q'umi'num language has a beautiful word "nuts'a'maut" that literally means working together as one, but has much deeper meaning to those who practice it. That is what we need to strive for as we move out of a dark past and into the light.

Huy ch q'u (Thank you),  
**Mayor Jon Lefebure**  
*Chair of Cowichan Valley Regional District*

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# ABSTRACT

The Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) is a local governance entity created in 2010 to promote water and watershed sustainability in the Cowichan/Koksilah watersheds, ancestral home of the Quw'utsun First Nation. Co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the CWB represents a unique partnership between First Nations and local government. Through this model, Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD work together to advance whole-of-watershed health, demonstrating a commitment to moving down the path of reconciliation.

Water has provided the critical vehicle to support this partnership and the opportunity to learn from each other respectfully while working towards improving the health of the watershed. The Board has an enviable track record of planning and implementing technical work, creating a culture of water conservation, promoting science-based advocacy and implementing respectful community-based solutions.

This document outlines a Framework to guide the next steps in the Cowichan Watershed Board's evolution. The Cowichan watershed (including the Koksilah sub-basin) faces a number of challenges to water sustainability, including threats to water quality, water supply and cumulative impacts to habitat. The CWB is seeking ways to become more effective in addressing these challenges, promote reconciliation and take advantage of opportunities associated with the *Water Sustainability Act*.

Recently, through the support of the BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative and the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, CWB hosted a series of workshops that led to three main outcomes:

i) **Re-confirming and adding to the Principles that guide the Board's work.** Through the workshop series, an additional principle has been added to the previously endorsed principles of Representation, Transparency, Partnerships and "Whole of watershed thinking". The Cowichan Tribes' principle of "Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa': We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed" is now part of the CWB's Governance Manual.

ii) **Identifying three "Core Strategies" to inform how the CWB can evolve to be more effective in addressing watershed challenges:**

- 1) Improving the CWB governance model and strengthening its partnerships
- 2) Using Watershed Management tools more effectively
- 3) Increasing the CWB's role in watershed decision making

iii) **Defining three "Pathways to Watershed Health" that outline directions for future growth:**

- 1) Recognizing and supporting Indigenous Authority
- 2) Strengthening Partnerships to implement programs and processes under the current governance framework
- 3) Building readiness to act on opportunities in the *Water Sustainability Act*.

The Cowichan Watershed Board is committed to moving forward down each of the pathways as opportunities emerge, partnerships grow, and political and institutional contexts evolve.

# 1. INTRODUCTION



From the headwaters of Cowichan Lake to the estuary at Cowichan Bay, and including the large Koksilah sub-basin, the Cowichan is a world-renowned watershed. It is the heart of the Cowichan Tribes First Nation's territory, designated as both a federal and provincial Heritage River, and vital to the culture and economy of the entire Cowichan Region. The Cowichan River is treasured for fishing and recreational opportunities, and the underlying aquifer provides some of the best drinking water in Canada. However, as is the case in many watersheds across B.C., the Cowichan is also facing growing cumulative pressures and threats.

Since its inception in 2010, the Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) has played a critical and collaborative leadership role in watershed sustainability in the region. And, in today's context—with increasingly urgent water challenges at hand, and a growing recognition of the role of Indigenous authority and stewardship in sustainable watershed governance—the CWB's leadership is more important than ever<sup>1</sup>.

This document presents pathways for improving partnerships and reconciliation for the long-term health of the watershed and its communities. Specifically, it consolidates the thoughts, discussions, supporting research, and decisions emerging from a series of recent Watershed Co-Governance workshops attended by local elected leaders and senior staff of Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), as well as water policy advisors (See Box 1). It was guided by a Project Steering Committee, including senior representation by Cowichan Tribes, CVRD, CWB, the POLIS Water Sustainability Project, and the BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative. It is intended to catalyze further discussion both internally within the CWB, and with existing and new partners.

*(Note: Appendix A provides a list of the Steering Committee members, Cowichan Co-Governance Conversations Workshop Participants, and Cowichan Watershed Board members. Appendix B provides further background context to the workshop series.)*

***“Fundamentally, watershed governance involves reorganizing our decision-making approaches to align with the ecological boundaries associated with watersheds, instead of political or jurisdictional boundaries.”<sup>1</sup>***

<sup>1</sup> For more on the history and critical role of the CWB, see the 2014 Case Study: *The Cowichan Watershed Board: An Evolution of Collaborative Watershed Governance*. By Rodger Hunter with Oliver M. Brandes, Michele-Lee Moore, and Laura Brandes. POLIS Project on Ecological Governance. August 2014) Available at: <https://poliswaterproject.org/polis-research-publication/cowichan-watershed-board-evolution-collaborative-watershed-governance/>



## BOX 1

### Cowichan Watershed Co-Governance Conversations

A series of three workshops were hosted in the Cowichan valley over two and a half days between October 2017 and May 2018, involving CWB members and staff, senior staff from Cowichan Tribes and CVRD, and water policy advisors. (See Appendices A & D.)

The objectives of the workshop series were:

1. Identify opportunities to strengthen the local governance model for the CWB, by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the partners and through other improvements in structure and operations;
2. Explore options for expanding the mandate of the CWB so that the Board can fulfill an increased role in governance and decision-making; and
3. Build readiness for CWB to engage in discussions with the Cowichan Tribes, the Province, the CVRD and others as needed, to explore opportunities for advancing co-governance in the watershed.



Cowichan Watershed Co-Governance Conversations – Workshop #2. Cowichan Bay, January 2018

*Mukw' stem 'o' slhilhukw'tul.  
Everything is interconnected.*



## BOX 2

### At a Glance: History and Strength of Cowichan Watershed Board

Stewardship of the Cowichan River is a recognized success story in British Columbia, with a well-documented history of community-based collaboration. The Cowichan Watershed Board traces its roots to a drought crisis in 2003, when extremely low flows in the river prevented Chinook salmon from migrating upstream, and Catalyst Paper faced imminent shutdown. The response to this crisis was to create a plan for the watershed: the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan (CBWMP or the “Plan”). This award-winning (2007) Plan includes goals, objectives and actions concerning water conservation, supply management, quality, habitat and biodiversity, governance, and communications.

A plan, however, does not go far without an ability to implement it. The CWB was explicitly formed in 2010 to fulfill this critical implementation role. The CWB’s mandate is to provide leadership for sustainable water management to protect and enhance environmental quality and the quality of life in the Cowichan watershed and adjoining areas. From the Plan, the CWB also drafted a set of its own “plain language” aspirational targets to give focus and inspiration to the work. In 2016, the CWB passed a motion to include the Koksilah sub-basin in its geographic mandate, even though it was originally excluded from the Plan.

Early on in the CWB’s evolution, it was recognized that the distant and/or compartmentalized governance bodies that made decisions for the watershed were part of the problem. Calls for “local control” resonated throughout the watershed, giving voice to the widely held belief that the people who live in an area know it best and benefit most from good management, and therefore should have more involvement in and responsibility for watershed decisions.<sup>2</sup>

From its creation, the Board has been a co-governed entity based on partnership between Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD. The inaugural co-chairs were Lydia Hwitsum, Chief of Cowichan Tribes and Gerry Giles, Chair of the CVRD, with Rodger Hunter, a coastal and wetland biologist and senior manager in the BC Government, hired as Coordinator. Other elected representatives from the partners also serve as Board members, along with community representatives appointed by the co-chairs or senior levels of government. The Board is also supported by a strong Technical Advisory Committee that provides both local knowledge and scientific expertise (see Appendix C for a diagram of the CWB structure).

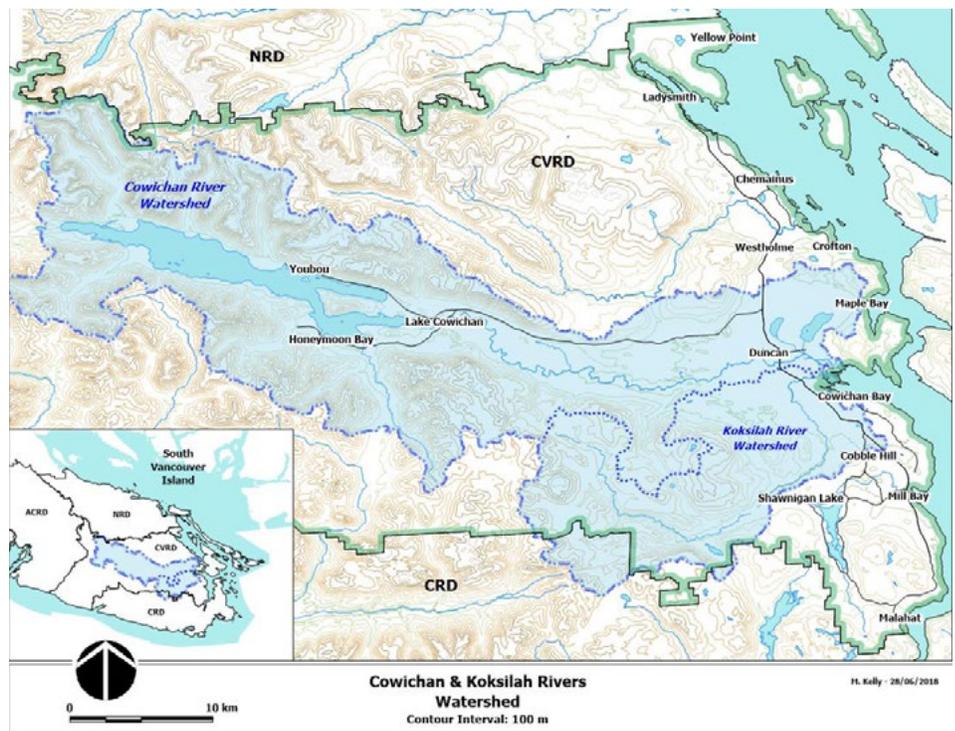
For almost a decade, the CWB has been active in the watershed, building a range of programs (See 2.3) and growing into a unique and leading example of local watershed governance in B.C. The Board has successfully built capacity through partnership, embracing a wide array of supporters and community-based collaborators.

<sup>2</sup> The non-profit citizens’ group “One Cowichan” documented support for local control of watersheds in 2013. See: <http://www.onecowichan.ca/supporters> and [http://www.onecowichan.ca/candidates\\_positions](http://www.onecowichan.ca/candidates_positions)

## 2. CONTEXT

“The elders talk about salmon runs being so numerous that there were runs all year round and you could fish all year round.”

*Tim Kulchyski, Cowichan Tribes Fisheries Consultant*



### Crisis, Cooperation and Community

The Cowichan watershed, like most in B.C., has changed dramatically in recent decades. Further shifts are anticipated as climate and hydrology change, bringing extremes that surpass existing conditions—already considered a crisis. Climate modeling predicts warmer, wetter winters and longer drier summers for the region.<sup>3</sup> The extreme droughts and flood events experienced in the past decade are expected to be the ‘new normal’ of the future. If no action is taken, it is likely that in many future years, the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers will be too dry to support fall salmon returns.

In this changing context, it becomes more apparent every season that watershed governance must also evolve, not only for ecological reasons, but for local communities’ health and economy. A collaborative approach that respects and engages local expertise, knowledge, and wisdom, in partnership with senior government, is needed more than ever.

This section details the growing issues on the ground (in the water) in the Cowichan watershed, the CWB’s unique strengths and role, and the opportunities for change offered by new Provincial government mandates and legislation.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/2101/Climate-Change> for details and a report on Climate Projections for the Cowichan valley Regional District.

## 2.1 The Cowichan's Growing Water Issues

The Cowichan watershed is experiencing persistent and escalating water challenges, with some of the most obvious evidence of impacts including:

**Salmon Impacts:** Salmon are a keystone species in the watershed, providing marine captured nutrients that support the entire ecosystem. Climate change impacts are already resulting in flow reductions that are having serious impacts to all life history stages of Cowichan salmon: interfering with the ability of adult salmon to migrate upstream to spawn; stranding juvenile salmon as they attempt to rear or migrate to the ocean; reducing food and habitat availability; and increasing vulnerability to predation. These impacts are compounded by forestry and land use practices and are expected to increase as climate change progresses. Efforts to mitigate these impacts include controlling water flows with the Cowichan Lake weir (see page 12), salvaging fry, building more rearing habitat, and trucking salmon upstream in the fall.

**Water Supply:** Climate change, forestry and increased water demand have affected local water sources, causing wells to run dry in some years.<sup>4</sup> Municipal watering restrictions occur annually. Summer droughts have also reduced surface water availability for agriculture in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds, leading to voluntary withdrawal restrictions, and impacts to food production, recreation and tourism. The weir at Lake Cowichan is no longer sufficient to address low summer and fall supplies in the Cowichan (see page 12).

**Winter Flooding:** Warmer winters are resulting in reduced “natural storage” in snowpack and increased flooding from Lake Cowichan all the way down to the Cowichan Tribes community near the estuary. Development and land use practices are also contributing to this problem.

**Water Quality:** Issues in the watershed range from shellfish toxicity in the estuary, to toxic algae in Quamichan Lake, to health risks associated with high E. Coli levels in some areas.<sup>5</sup>

**Cumulative impacts–Damaged Habitats and Ecosystems:** Land use practices have resulted in wide-scale aquatic and riparian habitat degradation throughout the watershed. Existing legislative tools (e.g. Riparian Areas Regulation, Fisheries Act) are not protecting habitats. Local organizations are helping with riparian restoration projects and landowner education, but a comprehensive plan to address cumulative impacts is lacking.



Salmon being moved upstream by truck

“If the people who live in a watershed are more involved in decision making, better outcomes might be achieved.”

*(Cowichan Co-Governance Conversations Workshop Participant).*

<sup>4</sup> “There is evidence that in some areas the aquifers have dropped more than 100 ft. and in others a drop of just 25 ft. has resulted in deep wells going completely dry. As well, the lowest water levels ever recorded were seen on several Ministry of Environment observation wells. These aquifers have dozens of private wells drilled into them, but they are also shared by several water utilities.” See <http://www.cowichanwatershedboard.ca/content/whats-your-water-worth> and <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/groundwater-wells/aquifers/groundwater-observation-well-network/groundwater-level-data-interactive-map>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/lower-cowichan-river-closed-to-recreational-use-due-to-bacteria-1.1317360> for one example of high bacterial counts due to low river flows.

## BOX 3

“A new relationship between people and water needs to be established to ensure that there will be water supplies for human use, thriving ecosystems and a healthy economy.... both now and in the future.”

*Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan, 2007*

### Two unique challenges in the Cowichan watershed

**Privately Managed Forest Lands:** The majority of the watershed falls within privately managed forest lands, governed by the *Private Managed Forest Land Act*. As a result, significant resource management responsibilities are in the hands of forest companies. Local and Indigenous governments have limited ability to participate in and influence decision-making for these lands. Although various companies have efforts underway to improve forest practices, concern persists about the impacts of forest operations on the river and watershed.

**Cowichan Lake Weir:** The weir at the outflow of Cowichan Lake has been in operation since 1957. It is licensed and operated by Catalyst Paper, and is used to control the outflow from the Lake into the Cowichan River, providing water for both environmental flows and industrial use. With changing weather patterns, decreased snowpack and longer drier summers, the current infrastructure has helped lessen those impacts but is now proving inadequate.<sup>6</sup>



Identifying watershed values and threats with Cowichan Tribes' fisheries biologist Tim Kulchyski Cowichan Valley 2014, Courtesy of POLIS Project on Ecological Governance Water Sustainability Project.

<sup>6</sup> In 2017-2018, a formal Water Use Planning process was completed in the Cowichan, employing a structured decision-making model to balance all interests (Environmental, cultural, domestic water and effluent treatment, industrial, private property rights, agricultural, recreational, etc.) in determining strategies to adapt to climate change pressures. This process is using Pacific Climate Impact Consortium (PCIC) forecast weather data and it is evident that trade-offs and compromises will be required from all interests in order to ensure both sustainable aquatic environments and sustainable communities in the Cowichan Valley

## 2.2 Reconciliation in Action

Through the Cowichan Watershed Board's Co-Chair model, Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD have developed strong partnerships and demonstrated a deep commitment to moving down the path of reconciliation. Water—a vital shared resource—has provided a critical vehicle for the partners to respectfully work together, with a common focus on the health of the Cowichan watershed and all of its residents, now and into the future.

Some of the ways in which the CWB manifests local steps towards reconciliation include:

- **Recognition of territory.** Territorial recognition is demonstrated in the Cowichan Recognition Statement, which was supported unanimously for inclusion in the CWB's Governance Manual (2018), and verbally by CVRD and CWB leaders during public meetings (See Box 4).
- **Active inclusion of Cowichan Tribes culture and language in CWB events and meetings.** Both the CVRD Chair and CWB Executive Director have taken Hul'q'umi'num' language classes to be able to open a meeting in both languages. Important meetings begin with a welcome from a Cowichan Elder or representative.
- **Recognition of the inherent authority of Cowichan Tribes that manifests through the Watershed Board.** For example, this is demonstrated by the acceptance of the Cowichan Recognition Statement into the Governance Manual.
- **Adoption of the principle *Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa'*: We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed.** This Cowichan Tribes principle is now included in the updated 2018 CWB Governance Manual, with recognition that significant training is required for Board members to fully understand the meaning of this principle and how it translates into CWB operations and decision-making.
- **Indigenous voice in decision-making on matters that affect Cowichan Tribes and their territory.** As reflected at the CWB table, Cowichan Tribes' authority and responsibilities are not limited to on-reserve lands, but encompass the whole watershed.
- **Inclusion of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge.** This is built into the CWB membership and technical working groups that generate recommendations to the Board.

The CWB's partnership approach to water can serve as a model of how Indigenous nations can move forward with governments at all levels. The benefits of working together are particularly valuable as communities face the stresses of climate change, population growth, and other pressures.

“We do this because it's the right thing to do. It's not because we're mandated by the Province – that's not what drives reconciliation. It's local relationships.”

*(Brian Carruthers, CVRD Chief Administrative Officer)*

“You guys are just as important to us as we are to you.”

*Chief William Seymour, Chief of Cowichan Tribes.*



## BOX 4

### Cowichan Recognition Statement

In March 2018, the CWB unanimously approved incorporating the following statement into the CWB Governance Manual, to acknowledge Cowichan Tribes' history on the land and inherent rights:

*Quw'utsun mustmuhw, ni' 'o' ni' tthu sht'esulh kws 'i' tst 'u tun'a tumuhw, 'i' 'o' hwun st'e. Nilh 'o' thu-'it syuw'entst, tun ni' 'u kwthu hwun'a mustimuhw 'i' wutl'uts' 'i' 'u tun'a tumuhwtst. Ni' yuxtse'tum tthu Quw'utsun 'u tthu-i tumuhw, qa', kw'atl'kwa tthu ni' spupin' 'u tthu tumuhw, ttho' mukw' stem ni' hakw ni' 'u tthu stl'ulnuptst. Kwuthu shtun-ni' 'iws tst ni' yuxtse'tum 'u ttho' mukw' stem ni' ha'kw kws sthuthi's kws huli-s. O' nilh tthu Quw'utsun mustumuhw, ni lemuxutunstum 'u tthu ni' snuwuntewut 'u tthu shtunaalhtun, tst. Uwu tumtem-us 'i' ni' tst tsmem't 'aanlh kws kwun-etewut, hwayum tun'a s'aalh stl'ulnup. Quw'utsun Mustimuhw, ha'kwush tst kw' stutul'na'mut sxetsul's kw' shtuhims tthu stl'ulnuptst. Mukw' stem 'o' slhilukw'tul 'i' nilh ni' shkw'akw'ums tthu sulsuli'tst.*

Cowichan Peoples have existing inherent rights. Cowichan as the original Peoples of this territory within which the Cowichan Watershed is included continue the right and responsibility to make informed decisions to manage and organize based on our history and continued connections. As told through time by our ancestors; the lands, waters, seas, minerals, air and all elements interconnected within the territories provided for and can provide a good sustainable life for Cowichan Peoples. Cowichan has never given away this right and continue to govern and make decisions to support the well-being and sustainability of our Peoples and territories.



“Cowichan people are connected to, reliant on, and managing our resources as we have since time immemorial.”

*(Cowichan Co-Governance Conversations Workshop Participant).*

### 2.3 CWB Strengths and Achievements: A Strong Foundation to Build Upon

The Cowichan Watershed Board, with the support and commitment of its foundational partners, is well-positioned to play an increasing leadership role in the watershed by improving coordination, and bringing local and traditional knowledge and expertise into decision-making. The CWB’s commitment to co-leadership by First Nations and Regional Government, along with the dual emphasis on both ecological and community sustainability, is critical to achieving common long-term goals and reconciliation in the watershed, with positive ripple effects for other working relationships between the partners.

Some of the ways in which the CWB manifests local steps towards reconciliation include:

**Local Knowledge and Science-based Advocacy:** The CWB Technical Advisory Board has developed eight broadly scoped “watershed targets” based on the The Plan. These targets cover issues with water quality, estuarine health, sustainable fish populations, healthy summer water flows, riparian habitats, watershed awareness, wise water use, and public health. Five active working groups, comprising over 50 local advisors, collaborate to address these targets, with representation from all levels of government, First Nations, industry, academic institutions and non-profit organizations. Through engagement in water planning processes, public meetings, one-on-one dialogue, and local media, CWB members, staff and partners are advancing a science-based understanding of the complex issues and trade-offs involved in water management in the Cowichan Watershed.

**Respectful Community-Based Solutions:** The CWB actively points to solutions instead of pointing fingers. For example, when the CWB’s water quality monitoring team found high E. Coli levels, they supported twelve Cowichan Valley dairy farmers to form a Group Environment Farm Plan to address (and help fund) better nutrient management. The same group is now looking at water conservation solutions after CWB partnered with provincial representatives from Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development and Ministry of Agriculture to examine the relationship between low summer flows and agricultural water use.

“The CWB’s best qualities are energy, innovation, respect, collaboration, cooperation and knowledge. Together these support the whole-of-watershed thinking that helps the organization succeed.”

*Rodger Hunter, Founding CWB Coordinator*



Local watershed stewards dive in to show onlookers what lives in the river at the 2017 Quw'utsun Cowichan Heritage River Celebration organized by the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable and Cowichan Tribes. Photo by B. Hetschko

**Public Education and Engagement:** CWB hosts a variety of public education initiatives, including a monthly speaker series, watershed tours, articles in local media, “water super-heroes” who visit children and youth, and an annual River Cleanup bringing people of all ages out to actively care for and connect with the Cowichan River. A five-year Cowichan Water Conservation Challenge is creating a culture of water conservation through ongoing public engagement and partnerships with the major water providers.

**Fiscal Efficiency:** Through grants and partnerships, the CWB is leveraging the core funding it receives from the CVRD and Cowichan Tribes by a ratio of 4:1, investing resources into the community through activities such as those described above. The CWB partnership model also helps other groups secure funding by working together, such as the recent Cowichan Tribes Coastal Restoration Fund proposal, which includes \$2.7 million dollars over five years for watershed priorities. In addition, by attracting a wide range of interested professional and academic advisors and volunteers, the CWB is able to achieve a great deal on its modest budget.

## 2.4 The Bigger Picture: Shifting Political and Institutional Context

Beyond the specific Cowichan context, workshop participants emphasized the importance of understanding the goals, commitments and capacities of senior levels of government so that we can better tailor our work to create win-win scenarios through innovative governance arrangements.

In particular, B.C.'s provincial government has clearly stated its commitments to advancing true, lasting reconciliation with First Nations, and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This shift in approach is expected to result in fundamentally different ways of making decisions about land and water. B.C.'s strong commitments to reconciliation are echoed in federal government mandates and by local governments across the province.

The Province has also committed to modernizing land use planning, bridging the rural-urban divide, implementing the 2016 Water Sustainability Act, and prioritizing source drinking water protection. The Water Sustainability Act in particular provides key mechanisms enabling strengthened freshwater protection. However, the Act has only been partially implemented to-date; further work is required to develop policy and implement a robust suite of supporting regulations to ensure the WSA fulfills its potential for sustainability and a partnership-based approach. (see Section 4.3)

In parallel to Provincial action, Indigenous nations are also leading new and innovative approaches to watershed management and governance—including Government-to-Government Agreements, co-management models, revitalizing Indigenous laws, and creating water declarations and policies.

Within this changing Indigenous, provincial and regional governance “waterscape”, the CWB has established a successful reconciliation-based partnership which presents an innovative and effective model for watershed governance throughout B.C.<sup>7</sup>



Public engagement: “Its hip to fix a drip.”

<sup>7</sup> Many different examples of such innovative approaches are emerging across B.C. and beyond, such as:

- The Okanagan Nation Alliance has created a Syilx Water Declaration that sets out the Nation's vision, principles, relationship, and responsibilities for fresh water ([https://www.syilx.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Okanagan-Nation-Water-Declaration\\_Final\\_CEC\\_Adopted\\_July\\_31\\_2014.pdf](https://www.syilx.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Okanagan-Nation-Water-Declaration_Final_CEC_Adopted_July_31_2014.pdf))
- The Haida Gwaii Management Council, created under the 2009 *Kunst'aa Guu – Kunst'aayah Haida Reconciliation Protocol*, is permanent table to which both the Crown and the Haida Nation delegated their respective authorities to make joint, consensus decisions on strategic land and resource management issues (<http://www.haidagwaiimanagementcouncil.ca/index.php/faqs/>)
- Several nations, including Cowichan Tribes, are revitalizing Indigenous laws for lands and water.

## 3. GOING FORWARD: ASSUMPTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE CWB'S WORK

The CWB is committed to evolving to be more effective in addressing watershed challenges.

The following assumptions and strategies were identified during the workshops to guide that progress.

### 3.1 Assumptions

The path forward is supported by these understandings:

- Cooperation, partnership, and collaboration are essential to any successful approach: the options pursued must be supported by Cowichan Tribes, the CVRD, and other core partners.
- Close cooperation with federal and provincial agencies—which hold statutory authority for resource management decision-making under Canadian laws—will be essential for effective management and governance in the watershed.
- The CWB will take an incremental approach to increasing its role in the watershed to learn by doing, build capacity, and adjust roles and responsibilities.
- Expanding the CWB's role and scope of responsibilities will require matching resources (financial and human) and institutional capacity.
- Many of the pathways described below are new and there is no 'blueprint' for how to proceed.

### 3.2 Core Strategies

Through the workshop series, three broad strategies emerged that capture how the CWB can progress. These cross-cutting strategies will inform any approach the Board takes.

#### 1. Improving the CWB governance model and strengthening partnerships.

Concrete opportunities exist for the CWB to improve its governance and partnerships, including:

- Improving administrative and operational effectiveness to ensure the Board operates smoothly and efficiently with clarity around roles, responsibilities, and decision-making.
- Strengthening mandates and partnerships, including: solidifying the foundational relationship between the CVRD and Cowichan Tribes; improving coordination with the Province; improving communications between CVRD and Cowichan Tribes staff at all levels; and advancing the CVRD Watershed Services bylaw to improve local water management and secure sustainable funding to the CWB.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The Watershed Services bylaw passed in the October 2018 municipal election. See <https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/DocumentCenter/View/90699/4202> for details.

## 2. Embracing new approaches to use existing watershed management tools more effectively.

A suite of resource management tools exists that the CWB can use more effectively for better watershed outcomes. Key areas to develop include:

- A solid foundation of watershed assessment and science to support decision-making that draws on Cowichan Tribes' knowledge and existing monitoring and information systems.
- Improvements to the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan, or other watershed plans, to provide a comprehensive tool to improve land-water linkages, water quality and flow.
- Coordination of monitoring and assessment initiatives across jurisdictions to assess the "state of the watershed" and measure progress towards watershed goals and targets.

## 3. Increasing the CWB's role in decision-making.

Given its proven effectiveness at bridging between different jurisdictions, improving coordination, and bringing local knowledge and expertise to bear on decision-making, Cowichan Co-Governance Conversations Workshop Participants urged the CWB to play a more active role in collaborative decision-making about water and the watershed. A spectrum of expanded governance roles is possible, from a legally recognized advisory position to providing input to inform decision-making or veto powers on key issues like licensing. See Box 5 for some ways in which the CWB can play an enhanced role in decision-making.



## BOX 5

### Multiple Scales of Watershed Decision Making

A wide variety of options exist for local watershed entities, like the Cowichan Watershed Board, to contribute to watershed governance outside of the 'statutory decision making' powers enabled through legislation. Essentially any activity that helps shift decision-making in an area to be based on ecological boundaries and functions, rather than political or jurisdictional boundaries, is part of watershed governance.

The following examples were suggested for the CWB by Cowichan Co-Governance Conversations Workshop Participant - Deborah Curran, (Faculty of Law and School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria):

- Developing an ecosystem-based management approach to science in the watershed;
- Generating ongoing, credible scientific data;
- Providing recommendations and advice to all levels of government on planning, law and application-driven decisions based on the ecosystem-based framework and scientific data;
- Undertaking cumulative impacts assessments of key areas over time or as significant applications come forward;
- Being consulted specifically by the province on water licensing decisions for both groundwater and surface water;
- Being consulted specifically by the local governments on the water implications of land use decisions;
- Developing municipal policy (OCP) and bylaw language based on the generated science (e.g. impermeability standards for areas within 0.5 km of the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers);
- Developing metrics to undertake long-term evaluation of watershed health and reporting on progress on those metrics every three years.



## 4. PATHWAYS TO WHOLE-OF-WATERSHED HEALTH

Guided by the above assumptions and strategies, three main pathways were identified for the CWB to maximize its potential and readiness to improve watershed health and sustainability:

- 1 **Recognizing Indigenous Authority**
- 2 **Strengthening Partnerships**
- 3 **Building Readiness to Act on Opportunities in the Water Sustainability Act**

The CWB will pursue all three pathways as different issues and opportunities emerge, partnerships grow, and political and institutional contexts evolve.

### 4.1 Recognizing Indigenous Authority

The Cowichan Watershed Board acknowledges the inherent rights of the Cowichan Tribes people in their territory (see Recognition Statement see Box 4), and is interested in supporting Cowichan Tribes wherever appropriate to explore how Indigenous water laws could improve outcomes for the watershed and Cowichan people.

Recognition of Indigenous authority is an emerging priority in the Cowichan, across B.C., and beyond. Addressing Indigenous laws, authority, and co-governance are overarching considerations that weave throughout the other “pathways” described below.

Indigenous authority and governance are expressed as an inherent right. Indigenous Peoples are expressing that authority through a range of options. Collaboration and partnership opportunities strengthen local relationship-building through Indigenous reconciliation approaches. The strategic partnership with local government for the well-being and sustainability of the Cowichan Watershed can provide visible support for recognition and reconciliation. Indigenous law included in Cowichan traditional territory reflects Indigenous values and the need for sustainability.

Indigenous Peoples can bring inherent authority forward and look to collaborate or partner with other jurisdictions. The strategic collaboration and recognition of Cowichan Peoples and territory at the CWB level demonstrates building blocks for reconciliation in action. This building reconciliation approach adds strength to the overall strategic reconciliation approaches that Cowichan Tribes will continue to develop and apply.





Revitalization and implementation of Indigenous water laws is another important element of the work being done in the Cowichan. Cowichan Tribes is currently engaged in a water laws revitalization process in partnership with the University of Victoria’s Indigenous Law Research Unit.<sup>9</sup> How these Indigenous laws are implemented and interact with existing federal, provincial, and local authority is being explored.

The workshop series also highlighted many immediate projects the CWB can embark on to build more effective partnerships and deepen understanding, like training all CWB members in *Nutsamat kws yaay’us tth qa’*; improving cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity; and raising awareness about the different roles and responsibilities of key players like the CVRD and Cowichan Tribes. Other immediate opportunities exist for enhanced collaboration, such as working with Cowichan Tribes to define appropriate water quality targets, flows objectives, or land use priorities.



## 4.2 Strengthening Partnerships

The CWB has opportunities through its existing partners, or through potential future partnerships, that would allow it to achieve common goals with those organizations within the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed boundaries. Some promising examples include:

**Cowichan Tribes:** Beyond the CWB’s support for Cowichan Tribes’ engagement in Indigenous authority opportunities, opportunities also exist for the CWB staff to work collaboratively with Cowichan Tribes managers and technical staff to plan and implement a variety of technical initiatives including water quality monitoring, sediment management, eelgrass protection, clam garden development, habitat restoration works and other similar initiatives.



**Local Government:** The CWB is ideally positioned to partner with the CVRD and other local government across a wide range of initiatives, such as monitoring, outreach/education, water use planning, water conservation, permeable landscaping, and understanding water sources.

**Provincial Government:** Beyond engaging in WSA implementation (see pathway 3 below), the CWB can support provincially-led technical initiatives through its established “target working groups” and implementation through coordination of community involvement. This work could include, for instance:

- Establishing and monitoring critical flow thresholds
- Drought preparation and response
- Source water protection including monitoring and outreach
- Cowichan Estuary Management Plan implementation



<sup>9</sup> <https://www.uvic.ca/law/about/indigenous/indigenoulawresearchunit/index.php>

The CWB can also act as an information and outreach conduit, assisting provincial government staff in communicating and consulting with Cowichan Valley residents around watershed issues.

**Federal Government:** Acting in coordination with the Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s representative on the CWB, the CWB could be a valuable partner in implementation of the Cowichan Chinook Rebuilding Framework and the Wild Salmon Policy.

**Local Stewardship Community:** The Cowichan Valley supports a robust and effective stewardship community with well-established organizations. Through its five Target Working Groups, the CWB provides an opportunity for representatives from these organizations to work collaboratively with technical representatives from First Nations and all levels of government to address watershed issues. The CWB can also facilitate access to funding to support this partnership work.

**Industry:** The CWB has worked hard to develop an effective working relationship with the major industrial players in the watershed and sees real opportunities to expand the scope and scale of these relationships to include:

- Working closely with Catalyst Paper in water use planning.
- Engaging with TimberWest forest management professionals, agency representatives and academic partners to develop a long-term hydrological monitoring program in the watershed.
- Continuing to support local farmers in acquiring the infrastructure and expertise required to meet mutual goals around nutrient management and water conservation.

**CWB Technical Advisory Committee:** A number of “whole of watershed” technical processes and tasks exist that the CWB could potentially lead through its multi-partner Technical Advisory Committee, including:

- Producing a “state of the watershed” report.
- Creating a data “hub” for the watershed, in collaboration with provincial and regional data managers, to pool water data and information from multiple sources, and make it publicly accessible.
- Expanding outreach and education outputs.

**Local Residents:** Individual residents can also prompt a partnership with the CWB by bringing concerns forward. Through the monthly Board meetings, at events, or via the website or Facebook pages, citizens raise concerns or share observations that can result in the CWB working with that resident to resolve or improve a situation.



Cowichan Watershed Board member Debra Toporowski and Water Super Hero “Flow” in Conservation Cruiser.

### 4.3 Building readiness to act on opportunities in the BC Water Sustainability Act

As noted in section 2, the *Water Sustainability Act (2016)* provides a suite of very positive changes to address water challenges and promote sustainability. The WSA offers great improvements towards treating the land and water of a watershed as an integrated whole and involving local knowledge and expertise in decisions. The CWB believes its strong partnerships and track record offer an excellent opportunity to demonstrate and develop WSA implementation in partnership with the Province.

However, implementation of the WSA is still in its infancy. There are currently very few tools that local communities can access until the Province further develops the regulations. In the meantime, the CWB can ensure that its partners understand the WSA<sup>10</sup> opportunities, and build readiness to leverage these new improvements as soon as the doors are open.

This section identifies seven tools or opportunities under the WSA, and very briefly describes:

- what the tool is;
- what watershed and governance issues it might be able to help resolve; and
- the spectrum of possible roles for the CWB in either implementing or supporting each tool in the context of local challenges.

<sup>10</sup> This encompasses all of the options laid out in the 2016 Pilot Proposal



### Water Sustainability Plan (sections 64-85)

Water sustainability plans can be developed to prevent or address conflicts between water users or between the needs of water users and environmental flow needs, or to address risks to water quality or aquatic ecosystem health. Cabinet can enact several different regulations to make these plans binding; for example, water sustainability plan regulations can change the amount of water that licensees may divert, change conditions of use, or even cancel water in over allocated systems. Just as importantly, these plans have the potential to articulate various levels of drought response and also change land uses that impact water systems, thus offering localized approaches to dealing with drought or changing water supply regimes.

A wide spectrum of possible roles exists for the CWB in development of a water sustainability plan: from simply encouraging the Province to do a water sustainability plan, to providing advice throughout the process and helping adapt the key elements of the current Water Management Plan to fit as a water sustainability plan, all the way to CWB being designated as the entity responsible for developing the plan.<sup>12</sup>

### Advisory Board (section 115)

Advisory boards can be established to provide advice to the Province (and key statutory decision-makers) on several aspects of the Act, including (but not limited to): establishing water objectives; methods for determining environmental flow needs; and standards and best practices for diversion/water use. These Advisory Boards under the Act do not have decision-making authority, but allow for a formalized role to provide local expertise and input into decision-making and management. Creation of Advisory Boards requires action by the Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), who appoints the Board Chair and members.

The CWB could provide recommendations on appointing Advisory Board members and developing the terms of reference. Or, the CWB could be designated as an Advisory Board itself, building on the strength of its existing governance structure and partnerships.



**The CWB appreciates the support of the POLIS Project's Water Sustainability Project in providing this overview of opportunities for the CWB to improve watershed health under the new Water Sustainability Act<sup>11</sup>.**

<sup>11</sup> Further details on these tools are found in the September 2018 POLIS Briefing Note: Advancing Freshwater Protection—Opportunities in B.C.'s Water Sustainability Act. See <https://poliswaterproject.org/polis-research-publication/advancing-freshwater-protection/>

<sup>12</sup> Note that the 2016 Pilot Proposal suggested that the CWB should be designated as the entity responsible for leadership and oversight of WSP implementation. See page 15 of proposal.

### **Environmental Flows<sup>13</sup> and Critical Flows Thresholds (sections 15; 86-88; 124(o))**

No one single provision exists in the WSA related to environmental flows—instead, many different aspects of the Act can be used to address water supply and environmental flow issues. The opportunities include:

- Section 15 requires decision-makers to consider the impacts of their decisions on environmental flows (but does not set out what the decision-maker must consider, or how).
- Section 127 enables the Province to create a regulation to prescribe methods for determining environmental flow needs.
- Sections 86-88 set out critical flow and fish population protection orders, which can require license holders to stop or reduce water during periods of drought to protect ecosystems and fish.
- Environmental flows are also implied as important considerations in any of the planning instruments (e.g. water sustainability plans, area based regulations, sensitive stream designations, etc.) and in construction of other “works” in and about a stream (section 11).

Potential roles for the CWB in implementing the various environmental flows aspects under the new Act include:

- The CWB could help select the most appropriate method of determining environmental flows in the Cowichan and Koksilah—and then support regional staff to adopt this method as part of their section 15 obligations (and/or encourage the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and FLNRORD to have this embedded in regulation).
- The CWB could determine the appropriate environmental flow and critical flow thresholds (drawing on Cowichan Tribes’ knowledge and the existing scientific base), and then support the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and FLNRORD to have these thresholds set in regulation.
- If the CWB positioned itself as an Advisory Board (see above) it could also have a direct conduit to provide advice on methods of determining locally-appropriate environmental flow needs.
- The CWB could play an increased role in flows monitoring.

### **Water Objectives (section 43)**

Water objectives are set in regulation for the purposes of sustaining water quality, quantity, and aquatic ecosystems. Water objectives set out criteria for water quality and quantity that land and resource use decision-makers (including local government) are required to consider when making their individual decisions or plans. Therefore, water objectives are a critical means to link land and water decision-making and can address water supply, quality, and habitat issues.

The CWB could help describe locally appropriate water objectives that fit with the identified targets associated with the existing CBWMP, and based on Indigenous and scientific knowledge. The CWB could then encourage FLNRORD to implement these objectives as WSA water objectives. If the CWB was designated as an Advisory Board, it could also provide advice on methods of determining water objectives. The CWB could also be involved in monitoring implementation of water objectives.

<sup>13</sup> Environmental flow needs are defined in the WSA as: *the volume and timing of water flow required for the proper functioning of the aquatic ecosystem of the stream*. Critical environmental flow threshold is defined as *the volume of water flow below which significant or irreversible harm to the aquatic ecosystem of the stream is likely to occur*.

### **Sensitive Stream Designation (section 128)**

This section of the WSA enables the designation of streams and hydraulically connected aquifers as “sensitive” if this will contribute to the protection of a fish population whose sustainability is at risk because of ecosystem damage. Any new authorizations on sensitive streams may have additional protections including possible terms and conditions related to mitigation, water use, and monitoring and reporting. This designation offers an opportunity to address water supply/quantity issues.

The CWB can encourage FLNRORD to have the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers designated as “sensitive” due to ongoing concerns about fish populations and sustainability of the overall river system.

### **Water Reservations (section 39)**

A water reservation sets aside unrecorded water in a stream or aquifer for a specific purpose, like future or ongoing treaty negotiations and agreements; to accommodate future demand for municipal water supply; or for environmental protection. A water reservation therefore is an important tool to address water supply/flow issues. It could, for instance, retain water in the stream or aquifer for fish by prohibiting the diversion of that water for other purposes.

The CWB could seek to have such a reservation created to protect flows for fish and for other important ecological, cultural and social water uses.

### **Delegated Authority (section 126)**

This section of the Act introduces the possibility to delegate certain statutory decision-making under the WSA to another “person or entity.” Decisions available for delegation include those otherwise made by the comptroller, water manager, engineer or officer, and could include things like water licensing decisions and amendments, and enforcement related to key provisions or conditions, among other things. It is not yet clear how this delegated authority process would work. Clear criteria, resources, and accountability measures will be required.

Section 126 could provide (in the long run) an avenue through which the CWB could directly draw down Provincial authority for specific aspects of WSA decision-making. This process would involve further review and adaptation of the CWB’s governance structure, operations, and interactions with Indigenous authority.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The Cowichan Watershed Board is committed to working with partners to support a thriving Cowichan watershed, now and into the future.

The CWB will take every opportunity to support partnerships and efforts with Cowichan Tribes, recognizing their inherent authority and responsibility for the watershed.

The CWB is also committed to working with partners at federal, provincial, and local levels to pursue a range of immediate opportunities to address watershed issues.

As opportunities present themselves, the Board is ready to engage with a diverse suite of partners to collaborate and build whole-of-watershed health.

Finally, the CWB will continue to seek opportunities to partner with the Provincial government in bringing the WSA to life in the Cowichan. The CWB is well-positioned to do so based on its strong foundational partnerships and watershed expertise.

“The living systems of this watershed are under tremendous pressure and the status quo is not good enough to safeguard them. The responsibility for stewardship of water and the watershed lies with us, the people who live here. The decisions we are making right now —or failing to make—will have possibly irreversible effects on future generations.”

Tom Rutherford,  
Executive Director, Cowichan Watershed Board

## 6. APPENDICES

### A. Participants

#### Cowichan Watershed Board Members

Co-Chair Chief William Seymour, Chief of Cowichan Tribes  
 Co-Chair Mayor Jon Lefebure, Chair of CVRD  
 Ian Morrison, CVRD Director  
 Darin George, Cowichan Tribes Councillor  
 Debra Toporowski, Cowichan Tribes Councillor  
 David Slade, groundwater specialist  
 Lori Iannidinardo, CVRD Director  
 Tim Kulchyski, Cowichan Tribes fisheries biologist  
 Dr. David Froese, GP, biologist  
 Dr. Laura Brown, Area Director, South Coast BC, DFO  
 Klaus Kuhn, CVRD Director  
 Honorable David Anderson, former Federal Fisheries Minister/Environment Minister  
 Mayor Ross Forrest, Mayor of Town of Lake Cowichan

#### Cowichan Watershed Co-governance Conversations

##### Steering Committee

Lydia Hwitsum	Former Chief and Founding CWB co-Chair	Cowichan Tribes
Larry George	Lands, Fisheries and Governance Manager	Cowichan Tribes Alt.
Brian Carruthers	Chief Administrative Officer	CVRD
David Slade	Groundwater specialist	Cowichan Watershed Board
Tom Rutherford	Executive Director	Cowichan Watershed Board
Jill Thompson	Project Coordinator	Cowichan Watershed Board

##### Observers/Advisors

Oliver Brandes	POLIS Project Director, CWB Advisor	University of Victoria
Rosie Simms	Project Manager and Researcher, POLIS	University of Victoria
Jennifer Archer	Program Manager	BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative
Julian Griggs	Facilitator	Dovetail Consulting Group

##### Cowichan Co-Governance Conversations Workshop Participants

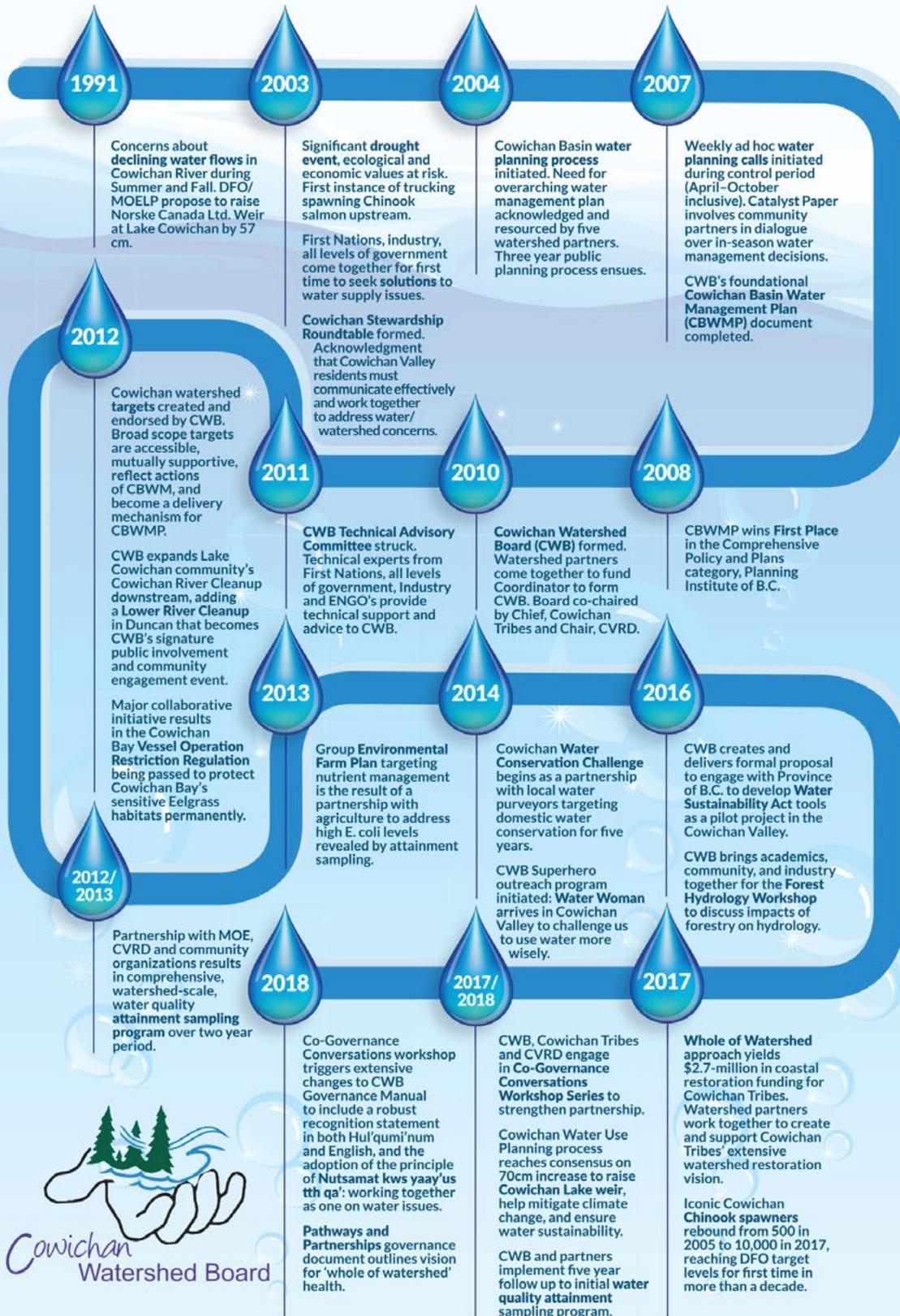
Chief William Seymour	Chief	Cowichan Tribes
Lydia Hwitsum	Watershed Co-Governance Project Leader	Cowichan Tribes
Larry George	Land & Governance Manager	Cowichan Tribes
Philomena Williams	Elder	Cowichan Tribes
Peter Williams	Elder	Cowichan Tribes
Alice Jimmy	Elder	Cowichan Tribes
Debra Toporowski	Councillor	Cowichan Tribes
Darin George	Councillor	Cowichan Tribes
Larry George	Land & Governance Manager	Cowichan Tribes

*Continued on next.*

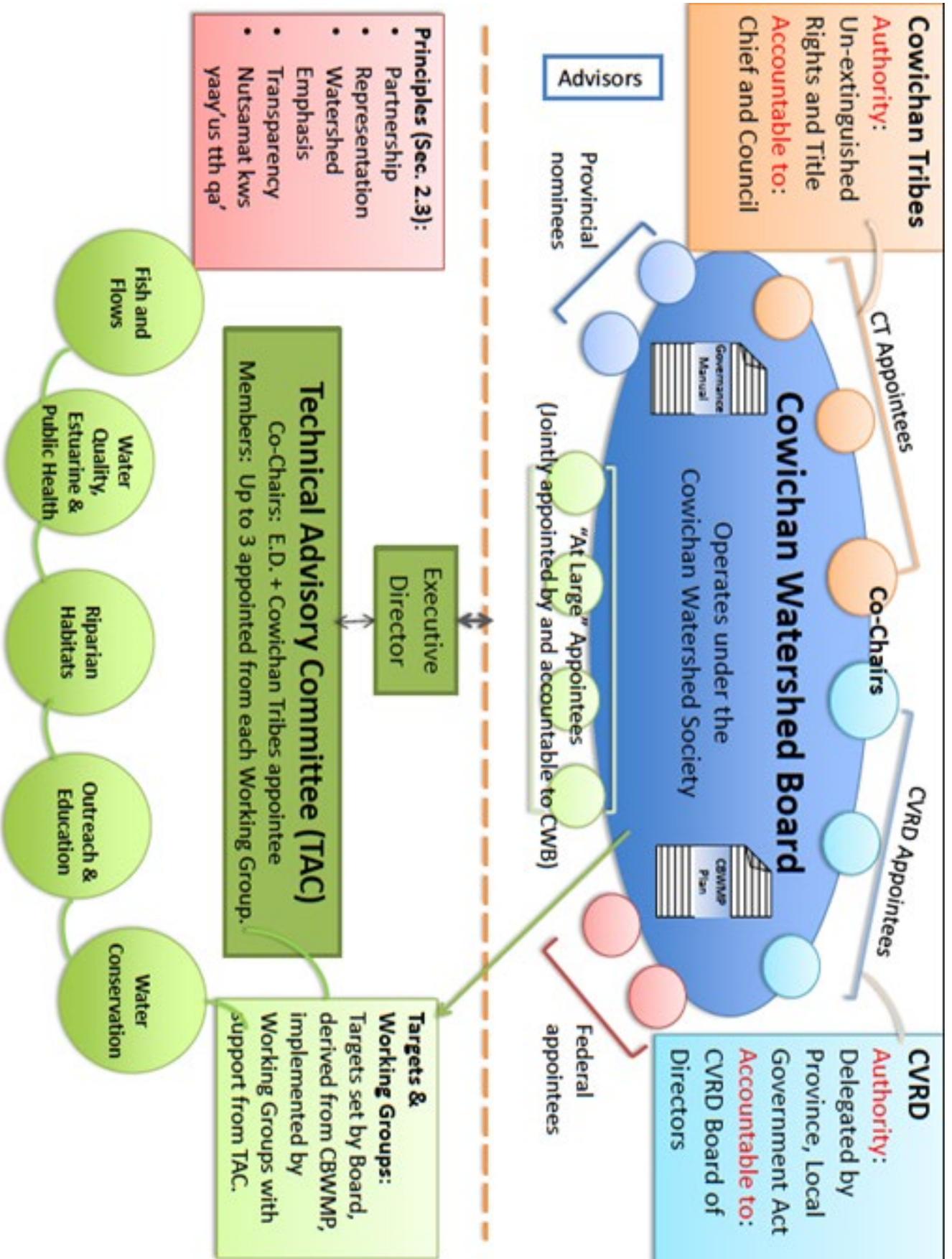
Tim Kulchyski	Natural Resource Consultant	Cowichan Tribes
Eamon Gaunt	Cowichan Treaty Analyst	Cowichan Tribes
Candace Charlie	Referrals Coordinator	Cowichan Tribes
Natalie Anderson	Referrals Coordinator	Cowichan Tribes
Sarah Morales	Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Law	University of Ottawa
Mayor Jon Lefebure	Chair	CVRD
Ian Morrison	Director	CVRD
Klaus Kuhn	Director	CVRD
Alison Nicholson	Director	CVRD
Lori Iannidinardo	Director	CVRD
Brian Carruthers	Chief Administrative Officer	CVRD
Kate Miller	Environmental Services Manager	CVRD
Laura Brown	Area Director, South Coast	Fisheries and Oceans Canada
David Slade	Groundwater specialist, Drillwell Ent.	Cowichan Watershed Board
Ross Forrest	Mayor	Town of Lake Cowichan
Rodger Hunter	Founding Coordinator, Cowichan Watershed Board	Independent
Deborah Curran	Executive Director, Environmental Law Centre	University of Victoria
Oliver Brandes	POLIS Director, CWB Advisor	University of Victoria
Tom Rutherford	Executive Director	Cowichan Watershed Board
Jill Thompson	Project Coordinator	Cowichan Watershed Board
<b>Observers / Workshop support</b>		
Julian Griggs	Facilitator	Dovetail Consulting Group
Rosie Simms	Project Manager and Researcher, POLIS	University of Victoria
Jennifer Archer	Program Manager	BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative
Chloe Boyle	Note-taker	CVRD
Shantelle Voyageur	Note-taker	Cowichan Tribes
Sandra Thomson	Food	Independent
Amanda Marchand	Food	Independent
Zita Botelho	Project Manager	Sustainable Funding for Watershed Governance Initiative

## B. Timeline: Inception & Development of the Cowichan Watershed Board

# TIMELINE: Inception & Development of the Cowichan Watershed Board



## C. The Cowichan Watershed Board's Structural Diagram



## D. Background to Cowichan Co-Governance Workshop Series

In 2014, the B.C. Ministry of Environment provided a grant for the CWB to develop a pilot proposal exploring its potential role in watershed governance under the anticipated Water Sustainability Act (WSA). The CWB was already recognized as a provincial leader in engaging local people and First Nations in decision-making for better watershed outcomes. The purpose of the grant was to explore how the CWB model could be enhanced to include a larger role in watershed governance through a collaborative relationship with the province. The proposal was developed over the next two years with input and advice from key partners, advisors and members of the Board<sup>14</sup>.

In 2016, supported by Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD, the CWB brought its Pilot Proposal before the Ministers of Environment and Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations. The Board invited the Province to partner on a governance pilot using an incremental approach to increasing its role in management and governance in the watershed, via implementing key WSA tools (including setting water objectives and environmental flows standards, a water sustainability plan, and a role as a formal advisory board)<sup>15</sup>.

Although the proposal was not formally accepted in 2016, people familiar with the work of the CWB recognized the promise and success of its unique partnership approach and the CWB was encouraged to continue exploring potential governance improvements. Before re-engaging with the Province, the CWB sought the support of the BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative<sup>16</sup> and the POLIS Water Sustainability Project to host a series of workshops focused on strengthening its internal partnerships and reviewing its priorities and options. This resulted in the three 2017-2018 Co-Governance workshops from which this document originates.

<sup>14</sup>This work and the framing of the eventual proposal was supported by the University of Victoria's POLIS Water Sustainability Project as part of their Future of Water Law and Governance program.

<sup>15</sup><http://www.cowichanwatershedboard.ca/content/co-governance>

<sup>16</sup>The BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative is a project of Tides Canada ([www.bcwaterlegacy.ca](http://www.bcwaterlegacy.ca))



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance  
[watersustainabilityproject](http://watersustainabilityproject.org)

