



Cowichan Watershed Board

DRAFT

June 24, 2019

The Honourable Doug Donaldson, M.L.A.
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
PO Box 9428 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC. V8W 9V1

Dear Minister

We write today on behalf of the Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) regarding an important fish conservation matter on the Cowichan River. As you are aware, current flow conditions on the Cowichan River are at historic lows - 4.5 cubic meters per second (CMS), which is well below the allowable minimum of 7CMS normally permitted under the water storage license held by Paper Excellence. This reduced flow has been permitted through your Ministry in recognition of the extremely dry conditions on southern Vancouver Island. However it means that fish mortality is expected to be unavoidable unless significant rain falls through the summer. For context, It is expected that storage in the lake will be reduced to 0 before mid-August, necessitating pumping from the lake and associated negative impacts on Cowichan Lake's productive littoral zone and the wild salmon and trout juveniles it supports. At this point the river flows will be dependant on pumps – our river will truly be on “life support”.

As river flows drop and temperatures rise, resident trout in the Cowichan River are concentrated in a limited number of groundwater fed pools that provide suitable wetted, moderate-temperature habitats. The unnaturally high concentrations of game fish resulting from drought flows leave them particularly vulnerable to the additional stress associated with catch and release sport fishing.

As a result of these conditions, Cowichan Tribes has decided to request that their members stop fishing in the river, forgoing their constitutional right to do so.

Accordingly, we would encourage your Ministry to consider implementing a sport fishing closure on the Cowichan River immediately and leaving it in place until fall rains arrive and restore river flows. This measure would respect and mirror Cowichan Tribes decision to stop fishing and protect vulnerable trout species during low flow, high temperature conditions when they are concentrated in refuge habitats and under considerable stress.

With the reality of climate change and associated impacts on our resident trout populations and the habitats that support them, we see a need to adjust our fishery management strategies in order to ensure a sustainable resource for the enjoyment of future generations. We appreciate the efforts of Fisheries, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development operational staff to protect and conserve our natural heritage and urge you to consider providing them with the tools they need to do their job in the face of climate change effects and increasing demand for access to a precious and finite resource.

Sincerely,

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Chief William Seymour
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Chair, Cowichan Valley Regional District

About the Cowichan Watershed Board:

The Cowichan Watershed Board is a local governance model created in 2010 to provide leadership for sustainable water management in the Cowichan/Koksilah watersheds, ancestral home of the Quw'utsun First Nation. The CWB is co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District and 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.