

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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*Cover photo: Cowichan Tribes First Nation Chief William Seymour signs interim Government to Government agreement with BC Government Minister Doug Donaldson to jointly scope a plan for water sustainability in the Koksilah watershed. Photo by Barry Hetschko. (Feb 2020)*

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## Message from the Co-Chairs

“Watershed moments” are critical turning points that define the future; times when something new and irreversible is begun. Think of a raindrop rolling down to the ocean: Raindrops rarely go back upslope. Similarly watershed moments signify progress that can’t be undone.

2020 was the Cowichan Watershed Board’s tenth year and a very chaotic, challenging and sometimes tragic year in many ways here and around the world. However for the long term health of this watershed and its billions of living residents forever intertwined with our human community, it was an exceptionally successful year. Things we have worked toward for a decade or more to secure a healthier future finally started rolling our way.

As you will read in the pages that follow, the Cowichan Watershed Board, with its partners and collaborators, are on track to achieve tangible improvements within the next few years. The Cowichan River weir replacement is currently being engineered, with significant funding already secured for its construction, anticipated to begin within 5 years.

A government to government process is underway in the Koksilah sub-basin to identify better water and land management practices and policies that will reduce the impacts of critically low flows there on salmon and residents (particularly agricultural producers).

Still more work is underway to understand and restore riparian habitats, improve water quality and estuarine health, reduce water use, improve public stewardship and connections to rivers, and ensure that wild salmon will continue to thrive in the Cowichan watershed for generations to come.

At a provincial and federal scale, the shift to recognize the title, rights and inherent authority of indigenous people to steward their territories is opening doors to the way the Cowichan Watershed Board has always worked, supporting and funding local collaborative governance between Cowichan Tribes and its partners.

Much work is yet to come but this ‘watershed’ year has given the Board reason for optimism, and we hope you will feel the same after reading our report.

With respect,

Your Cowichan Watershed Board Co-chairs,

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## Background

In 2007, prompted by years of declines in the Cowichan River's iconic salmon runs, and increasingly frequent low-flows in summer, the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan (the Plan) was created. It benefitted from the participation of many local people and organizations working with provincial and federal agencies and won an award. Eighty-nine clear objectives were identified, and leadership for each was assigned to a wide variety of agencies and parties. However, no funding was assigned to accomplish the work, there was not a governing body with a mandate to coordinate between the many organizations with overlapping jurisdictions over water and indigenous leadership participation was lacking.

In 2010, sitting Cowichan Tribes Chief Lydia Hwitsum and Cowichan Valley Regional District Chair Gerry Giles came together and created the Cowichan Watershed Board. The governance structure was anchored by an equal partnership of the two governments, co-chaired by the leaders of each. Principles were developed, and later updated in 2018 to better reflect the indigenous authority, knowledge and collaborative leadership that underlies the Board's success. (See Appendix A)

In 2011 the Board's Technical Advisory Committee established 'targets' with the help of Cowichan Tribes, many local stewardship groups and relevant government agencies, to guide and inspire collaborative and locally-relevant progress towards the Plan's broad goals. (See Appendix A)

Since that time, through hundreds of meetings (most recently online), hours of field work and public outreach, and countless hours on email and phone calls, the Board's members, staff, partners and volunteers have steadily removed barriers to what's good for the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers and the whole watershed.

We are guided throughout by the hulq' umi num teaching *Mukw' stem 'o' shilhukw'tul* which translates roughly to "Everything is interconnected" or "we are all in this together," (check this) as well as the belief that if we take care of the watershed, the watershed will take care of us.

## Milestones on our 10th Anniversary

- Cowichan Lake weir engineering is underway.
- Koksilah Watershed Sustainable Planning is underway and co-governed by Cowichan Tribes and the BC Government.
- Cooperative approaches have been established in both the Cowichan and Koksilah to peacefully negotiate how to manage low river flows during dry seasons. (in-season EFlow committees)
- Four Working Groups are active in the collaborative pursuit of six of the seven CWB targets. (The 5th working group is taking a break while CVRD sets their plans for regional water conservation under the new Drinking Water and Watershed Protection service.)
- Dedicated and skilled stewardship groups throughout the watershed coordinate with us on specific features they are working to restore, such as Cowichan estuary, Koksilah watershed, Somenos and Quamichan sub-basins, Lake Cowichan, and riparian habitats.
- Over \$35 million in federal and provincial grants has been raised in the past few years for projects directly related to our priorities and targets, by Cowichan Tribes, CVRD, and the Cowichan Watershed Society. In addition, the CWB helped in provincial efforts to establish sustained funding sources for watershed work.

## 2020 By the Numbers

(create / insert graphic)

Major water storage infrastructure projects to protect river flows underway	1
Major Government to Government process to protect river flows underway	1
Publications / Articles by CWB	9
Published articles about Cowichan watershed or CWB	13
Presentations to CWB by subject experts	19
Presentations by CWB to others	Tom to fill
Hours spent hosting zoom meetings in 2020	Tom to fill
Dollars of outside funding announced for Cowichan watershed health activities in 2020	51,088,000



## Progress on Priorities 2020

### Cowichan River

In April 2020, work began to bring the Cowichan Weir Project to a “shovel ready” state. Stantec Engineering was retained by CVRD to complete the necessary engineering feasibility and design work with the final outcome being construction grade drawings and detailed budget estimates. This work includes innovative fishway designs that will ensure both upstream and downstream passage of all salmonid life history stages throughout the year. It also includes a cold water delivery system that will provide a mechanism for moving cold lake water from depth into the river during the heat of the summer when current river temperatures reach critically high thresholds. A second component of this project involves assessing whether there are shoreline impacts of increasing the storage capacity of the lake. More information, including the preliminary weir design, is at [cowichanlakeweir.ca](http://cowichanlakeweir.ca)

### Koksilah River

Cowichan Tribes signed an Interim Letter of Agreement with the Province of BC in February to begin scoping solutions to the water supply issues in the Koksilah. FLNRO Minister Doug Donaldson visited Chief Seymour in Council Chambers to hear presentations and sign the agreement, and take a field tour.

A Steering Committee co-chaired by the signatories worked throughout 2020 to determine whether and how to proceed towards a Watershed Sustainability Plan or other solutions. Work to date includes:

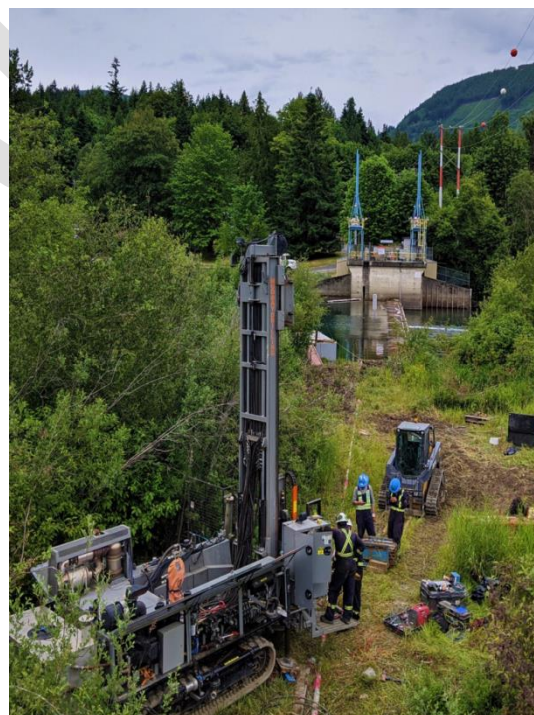
- initial hydrology study to determine the primary causes of low water.
- engagement and outreach included 13 indepth interviews and 278 survey respondents)
- community engagement process within Cowichan Tribes (impacted by CoVid)
- coordinated 2020 drought response between CWB, FLNRO, Min Ag, BC Dairy Association, ARDCorp, Water Survey of Canada, Koksilah Working Group. Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre, and Mosaic.
- piloted a citizen science approach to groundwater study with University of Victoria.

More information at [koksilahwater.ca](http://koksilahwater.ca)

# 1

#### Just Add Water.

- Rebuild Cowichan Lake weir.
- Pursue solution to Koksilah low flows.



Engineering underway at Cowichan Lake weir ( Photo by Leroy Van Wieren, June 2020)

## Progress on Priorities 2020

A major piece of work throughout 2019 and 2020 was a review of the 7 targets with the respective Working Groups. A series of meetings was held with four of five working groups to review progress on the target, and whether the targets and indicators were still appropriate. The results of this work will be finalized in 2021. The Water Conservation Working Group is inactive pending the plans of the CVRD Regional Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Service, although water conservation outreach is ongoing in the Koksilah watershed.



### Achieving our Targets.

- Facilitate collaborative working groups to achieve watershed targets.
- Implement legal tools to support targets where possible.

The most significant progress on targets in 2020 was on the priority goal of increasing summer water flows in the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers, as outlined on the previous pages. Other examples of specific progress toward targets in 2020 include:

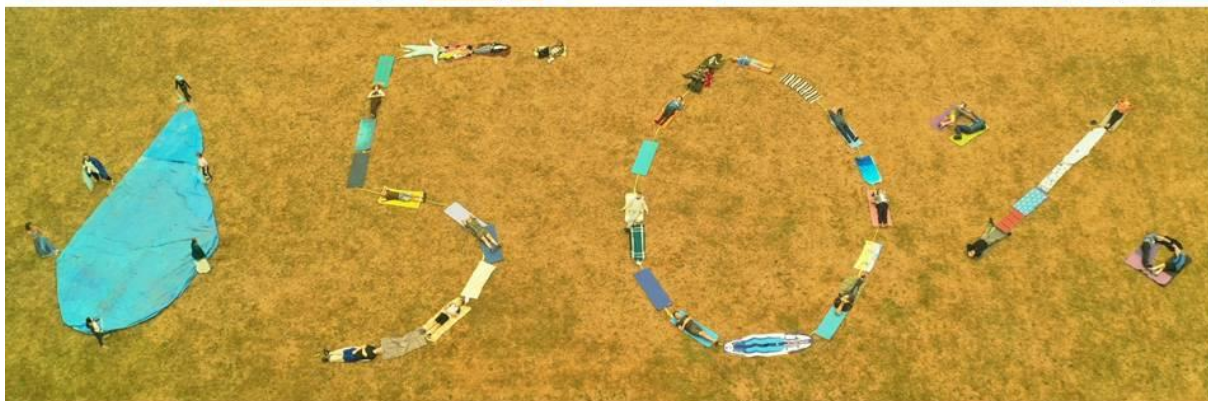
Flows Target:	See page 7. Significant progress and investments were made towards restoring sustainable flows to both the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers.
Fish Target:	As above. Progress was also made towards creating an in-season decision making framework to protect fish habitats from the impacts of low flows. Funding was secured to begin to fill a data gap in salmon stock assessments and fish habitat studies. The work will take place over the next 3 years.
Water Conservation Target:	Assisted with outreach efforts to encourage residents of the Koksilah watershed to reduce outdoor summer water use by 50%. See photo below.
Water Quality Target:	The Water Quality working group made progress on collaborating on desired WQ testing methods in the estuary. Presentations from Pollution Tracker helped inform future plans for WQ fundraising.
Estuary Health Target:	As above.
Riparian Target:	The Riparian Habitat Working Group explored how to pursue a more holistic approach to this target, including 'creeklets' and small streams throughout the watershed.
Watershed Connections (IQ) Target:	This group was unable to meet in 2020, but several groups maintained educational programs. The CWB produced the widely applauded video "Why Fish Need Water", and a series of articles on the public health theme of theme of Being Kind to the River, Calm with the River, and Safe

[See Appendix B for a list of the targets or this section of the website for more detail.](#)

A significant step was made towards implementing legal tools under the Water Sustainability Plan through the work on creating a Water Sustainability Plan for the Koksilah watershed. The process could also lead to legally binding Government to Government solutions through the recognition of indigenous rights and title.



While CoVid 19 prevented any of the usual public outreach or educational events in 2020, the CWB supported this socially distanced arial photo creation with residents to promote water conservation in Koksilah watershed gardens.



**Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre organized this community photo in support of water conservation in the Koksilah.**

**The group is helping residents implement garden irrigation improvements to reduce their water use by 50%.**

The event was supported by Warmland Dance, Cowichan Watershed Board, and local volunteers. Photos by Jens Barsballe and Frank Wall (Sept 12 2020)



CWB also created and published this very well received video by “Tim and Tom” ([YouTube](#))



## Progress on Priorities 2020

*“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.”*

Chief Seymour Cowichan Co-Governance  
Conversations, 2018.

In 2018, the CWB published the results of a series of workshops between CWB members, its founding partners, Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD, and advisors to review and improve its governance model. Partnerships were identified as not only a way of doing the Board’s work, but a goal of the work.

In 2020, a significant victory for indigenous watershed co-governance was realized with the creation of a Government to Government agreement between the Province and Cowichan Tribes to address critical water supply issues in the Koksilah watershed as partners, recognizing the overlapping authority of the two governments on water issues.

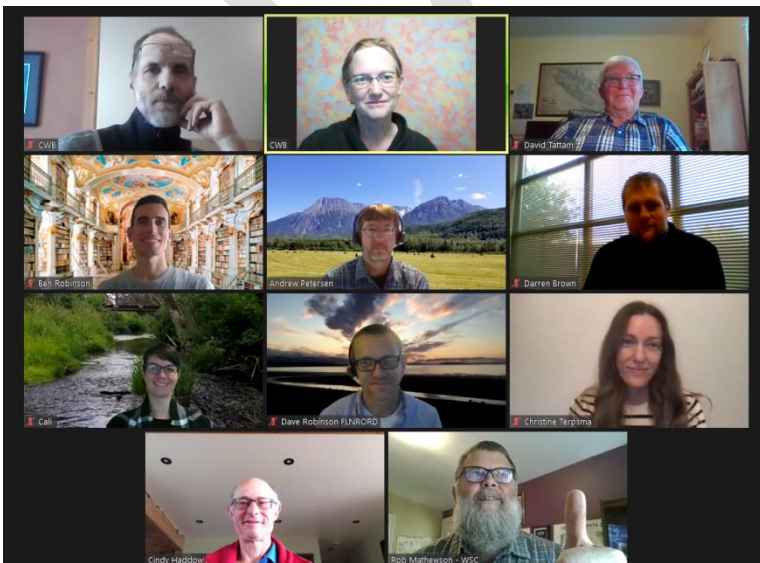
This progress was anchored, in part, by an ongoing commitment between the CWB and the West Coast Regional office of the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations to meet quarterly since April 2017. The goal of these meetings is to improve communications about issues of watershed sustainability and health in the Cowichan/Koksilah watershed, and the related work of both parties.

The major project to engineer and plan for the replacement of the Cowichan River Weir is similarly being done in partnership, led by CVRD, with Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst Paper and CWB all named as partners in the funding application.

# 3

### Building Partnerships.

- Support indigenous co-leadership, cross jurisdictional collaboration, and public engagement for watershed health.



Further funding of \$24 million towards the replacement of the weir, restoration of riparian function, and flooding mitigation work in the estuary was awarded to Cowichan Tribes by the Government of Canada in November 2020, for projects developed in partnership with the CVRD.

In the Koksilah watershed, where irrigation has been legally curtailed to protect critical fish habitat during low water flows, the CWB worked



collaboratively to support better information at all levels, and a less punitive voluntary approach to water conservation lead by the local agricultural community. The ad-hoc Koksilah Drought Response group met biweekly from April to October to discuss water levels and plan responses together. Regular participants included representatives from the BC Government, agricultural producers, Water Survey of Canada, a local residents' association, and the CWB.

The CWB also joined the provincial [Our Water BC](#) coalition to advocate for sustainable funding for watersheds from the BC Government including a presentation by Chief Seymour to the BC Budget Committee. This partnership effort resulted in, as a start, \$27 million in funding for watersheds throughout BC [announced in September](#) as part of the CoVid 19 Stimulus package. Some of this funding will be flowing back to Cowichan Region to assist with watershed projects in 2021.

Finally the CWB developed two projects that brought Cowichan Tribes and Halalt First Nations together in a Twinned Watersheds approach to filling data gaps in the Koksilah and Chemainus Rivers. Because these rivers are undergoing similar drought and development impacts, there are efficiencies in sharing crews and equipment to study both. CWB will be supporting the partnership between the Nations in undertaking these field science projects in the coming years.

In recognition of the high level of collaboration that the CWB fosters, the BC Freshwater Legacy Fund financed the creation of a video highlighting our work, and our partnership approach. It can be viewed at this [link](#).



Cowichan Watershed Board Co-Chairs Chief William (Chip) Seymour and CVRD Chair Mayor Aaron Stone share a laugh during a break at a CWB meeting.

Photo by Barry Hetschko.

## Financial Summary

INSERT Budget to Actuals comparison for 2020.

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# People and Partners. Huy tseep 'qu (Thank you)!

## 2020 Cowichan Watershed Board

Board Members	Society Members
Chief William Seymour/ Squtxulenuhw (Co-Chair), Cowichan Tribes First Nation	
Chair Aaron Stone (Co-Chair), Cowichan Valley Regional District	
Councillor Debra Toporowski /Qwulti' stunaat, Cowichan Tribes	*
Councillor Stuart Pagaduan / (name?), Cowichan Tribes	
Director Allison Nicholson, Cowichan Valley Regional District	
Director Lori Iannidinardo, Cowichan Valley Regional District	
Dale Desroches, Federal Govt. Appointee, Fisheries and Oceans Canada	
Dr. David Froese, Provincial Govt. Nominee, Biologist, General Practitioner	*
David Slade, Provincial Govt. Nominee, Groundwater specialist	*
Honourable David Anderson, Member at Large, Former Fed. Fisheries Minister	*
Tim Kulchyski / Q'utxulenuhw, Member at Large, Cowichan Tribes	*
Dr. Shannon Waters, Member at Large, VIHA -Cowichan Valley Medical Health Officer	*
Councillor Kristine Sandhu, Member at Large, Lake Cowichan Town Council	*

## 2020 Working Group Participants (tom to update)

Fish and Flows	Watershed Connections	Water Quality and Estuarine Health	Riparian Health
Cheri Ayers	Christy Wilson	Tim Kulchyski	Heather Pritchard
Tim Kulchyski	Roseanna Jackson	Deb Epps	Dave Polster
Mike McCulloch	Stephanie Cottell	Lori Iannidinardo	Christine Rikley
Jaro Szczot	Genevieve Singleton	Kate Miller	Jean Atkinson
Parker Jefferson	Lori Iannidinardo	Rodger Hunter	Diana Gunderson
Kevin Pellet	Jane Kilthei	Graham Gidden	Christine Brophy
Kate Miller	Alicia Taylor	Willi Jansen	Chris Steeger
Brian Houle	Pamela Williams	Kai Rietzel	David Slade
Molly Hudson	Elizabeth Aiken	Geoff Strong	Parker Jefferson
Joe Saysell	Kathy O'Donnell	Jim Cosh	Ian Morrison
Chris Morely	Jill Heard	Elizabeth Aiken	Tim Kulchyski
Kenzie Cuthbert	Elodie Roger	Dave Preikshot	Chris Morely
Ray Demarchi	Bob Crandall	Ray Demarchi	Dave Preikshot
Bob Crandall	Parker Jefferson	Sheila Harvey	Chelsea Toth
Jamieson Atkinson	Judy Stafford		Don Hare
Leroy Van Wieren	Melissa Nottingham		Genevieve Singleton
			Ken Traynor
			Jeremy Damborg



\*The Water Conservation Working group took a break in 2020, after completing a 5 year Water Conservation Challenge, while the CVRD determines its Water Conservation plans under the new Regional Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Service.

## 2020 Contract Support



## Participating Organizations (draft list – Tom check)

The Watershed Board only succeeds through the work and knowledge and collaboration of all levels of government, stewardship organizations, and others. It is impossible to list all the organizations who contribute to watershed health every year but in 2020, the following organizations participated directly in Cowichan Watershed Board partnerships, Working Groups, or collaborative efforts: Cowichan Tribes, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, BC Government – Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Operations, Ministry of Environment, Vancouver Island Health Authority – Cowichan Region, Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable, Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society, Cowichan Land Trust, Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society, Koksilah Watershed Working Group, Vancouver Island Recreational Paddling Association, Cowichan Estuary Nature Center, Cowichan Estuary Restoration and Conservation Association, BC Parks, School District 79, Mosaic, Catalyst / Paper Excellence

## Financial support was provided to the CWB via the Cowichan Watershed Society by

Cowichan Tribes First Nation, Cowichan Valley Regional District, the BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative, and also RBC Tech for Nature and the Province of BC via Cowichan Tribes. A sponsorship for public engagement was also received from Paper Excellence.

## Appendix A

# Purpose and Core Principles

The purpose of the CWB is to serve as a formal entity to improve collaborative management and decision-making to protect and enhance the health of the whole of the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds (collectively referred to as the Cowichan Watershed). This includes helping to guide the implementation of the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan (the Plan) and the associated Targets (the Targets) adopted by the CWB.

The CWB is committed to these Core Principles:

- *Partnership*: The Board is built on a collaborative partnership among Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD (the partners) and seeks to engage and bridge the interests of governments, regulatory agencies, local water stakeholders and citizens.
- *Representation*: The Board members are appointed to serve the best interests of Cowichan Basin citizens and the region as a whole in a manner that is consistent with federal and provincial interests that support sound watershed management. Members selected are, to the greatest extent possible, local community leaders and/or known water management champions-related experts.
- *Watershed Emphasis*: The CWB's priorities and activities are guided by a vision for the watershed as a whole that is based on ecological sustainability and "whole of watershed" thinking. "
- *Transparency*: To the greatest extent possible, the actions and decisions of the CWB will be transparent and open.
- *Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa'*: We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed. This is an ancient Cowichan Tribes principle. Orientation in the application of the principle will be provided by the Co-Chairs. ("Nutsamat")

## The Targets

Flows Target:	We want to ensure that Cowichan and Koksilah River summer flows are at levels that support the needs of people & fish.
Fish Target:	We want healthy fish populations in the watershed.
Water Conservation Target:	We want Cowichan watershed residents to use water wisely.
Water Quality Target:	We want clean water in our watershed.
Estuary Health Target:	We want to be able to eat shellfish from Cowichan Bay.
Riparian Target:	We want to protect and enjoy the benefits of healthy stream, lakefront, and estuary habitats.
Watershed Connections (IQ) Target:	We want Cowichan watershed residents to increasingly know and value their watershed.

