Fish Gut Alley Restoration Proposal
Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre and the Cowichan Green Community

In a collaboration between the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre and the Cowichan Green Community, we are currently applying for funding for a restoration initiative based in the riparian zone around “Fish Gut Alley” in Rotary/McAdam Park. After our initial consultation with Patrick Lucey and Steve Voller of Aquatex Scientific Consulting, the project plan is to work to remove the invasive species in the area around the channel, planting a variety of coniferous trees and native shrubs and plants. We will also work to remove the reed canary grass that is reducing flow velocities in the channel. The funding we are applying for will also cover some of the instream restoration, which will be carried out by Steve Voller and his team at Aquatex.

We hope to use this project to engage with the community at every step of the project delivery. We will host community volunteer work-bees, collaborate with local educators and naturalists on workshops, and create engaging interpretive signage throughout the park. We are hoping to create an 'outdoor classroom' space in the park that can be used by educators and community groups, and help deepen local stewardship and care for water and land. In partnership with the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and Saanich Native Plants, Hannah Auer of the Cowichan Green Community recently worked on a community native plant meadow in Rotary Park, in a lawn area adjacent to "Fish Gut Alley". This is a community-led effort to restore pollinator habitat and increase ecological abundance in the area. The vision for the Outdoor Classroom aspect of this project is to incorporate both the riparian zone restoration along “Fish Gut Alley” and the community meadow site. This fits into our larger vision of inspiring a local movement in the community to grow native plants in our own yards and gardens.

Here is some background on “Fish Gut Alley, according to the 2021 Master Parks Plan for Rotary/McAdam Park created by the City of Duncan:
“Fish Gut Alley provides important fish-rearing habitat and plays a critical role in the parks' ecological framework. In its early years, in the late 1970s and 1980s, Fish Gut Alley produced upwards of 19,000 fry and smolts, including a strong run of chum and upward of 800 adult coho salmon. In recent years, the stream habitat has become choked with sediment and vegetation and fish production has declined sharply. Reduced runs of these salmon, possibly due to access limitations created by dike upgrades and infrastructure degradation (culverts through the dike) has interrupted the natural yearly turning over of the gravel within the channel by spawning salmon. Without natural turnover, fine sediments and organic debris have accumulated over the spawning gravel, accompanied by the establishment of dense reed canary grass which reduces the flow velocities required to help keep spawning gravel clear. This has reduced the effectiveness of Fish Gut Alley as a spawning channel. There is little interpretive signage that provides information specific to Fish Gut Alley's history or ecology. Public input supports efforts to improve natural systems in the parks.”