

TO: Board Members, *Cowichan Watershed Board*

FROM: Vancouver Island Whitewater Paddling Society (per Edmond Duggan, Rick Bryan)

DATE: 2021 10 21

RE: Request for Follow-up, Weir Replacement Project

=====

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

We acknowledge that our activities take place on unceded traditional territories of Coast Salish people, including *Cowichan Tribes*. We further acknowledge that our canoes and kayaks are based on designs developed by North America's First Peoples. We are grateful.

OUR REQUEST IN BRIEF:

- We request the opportunity to update the Board on our proposal to add recreational value to the weir design.
- Specifically, we request your attention to the feasibility report from river engineers specializing in recreational design, whom we have engaged at our own expense. That report speaks not only to possibilities for integrating recreational features into the design, but also to enhancing fish passage, and general weir safety. (Copy of Report attached,)
- We also request your attention to fiscal and environmental reasons why our proposal, if adopted, should be incorporated into the initial construction of the replacement weir, rather than be deferred to a later date.

BACKGROUND:

Two years ago (2019 09 30) we screened a PowerPoint presentation at your September meeting. We requested the inclusion of recreational value in the Weir Replacement Project. Specifically, we proposed construction, of one or two play wave features, IF FEASIBLE. Such features, located just below a release gate or a fishway, would utilize a controlled flow, in compliance with the rule curve. https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WEIR-Recreation-presentation_RickBryan.pdf

Such play features would NOT interfere with water storage, fish passage, aquatic habitat, or riparian integrity. They would be constructed with mainly natural material, which would enhance the environmental integrity of the design, and support the natural appearance of the site.

On a positive note, installation of play waves would attract tourist revenue to local communities. And further, outdoor recreation is known to support physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual health.

Following our presentation, response from Board members was entirely positive, as reported in the minutes from the meeting. See p. 6 – 7 in >> https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WEIR-Recreation-presentation_RickBryan.pdf At the end of the meeting, Co-Chair Ian Morrison directed us to meet with CVRD staff to discuss details.

With that positive encouragement, we approached Project Director, Leroy Van Wieren. He declined to include our project in the engineering process, as there had been no official adoption of our proposal

Despite subsequent conversations with CVRD staff, our project remained in limbo. Funding restrictions were given as the main reason. (The design phase was funded by a grant from the *BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund [BCSRIF]*, but the terms of the grant excluded recreational use, as “not directly benefiting salmon.” We requested that the CVRD might seek alternative supplementary funding for recreational co-projects. They declined.

We recognize that 2020 - 2021 was a tumultuous time, and to oversee a huge and unprecedented engineering project, in addition to conducting regular business as usual, must have been a major challenge for the CVRD. We congratulate and thank them sincerely!

But the future of our proposal still remains in limbo.

At the CVRD’s recommendation, the paddlesport community independently raised over \$9,000, (including grants-in-aid from CVRD Directors, Areas E and F.) We engaged qualified Engineers to determine whether our project would be physically feasible. Their report (copy attached) indicates that our proposal IS, indeed, viable, and can be achieved in at least two different locations.

Project Manager Van Wieren kindly convened a virtual meeting among himself, Stantec’s rep, ourselves, and our two engineers, to discuss how our project COULD have been included in the weir design, except the design process was already “completed.”

Undoubtedly, to reopen the design phase to include our proposal would necessitate securing additional funding supplementary to the BCSRIF grant. Our expenditure of \$9,000+ would, of course, be our donation to the supplementary design process which has already begun. If our community could be of help in seeking and applying for further grants, we certainly stand ready to assist.

OUR ENGINEERS’ AND THEIR REPORT:

- **Recreation Engineering and Planning (“REP”)**: Gary Lacy, Boulder, CO, : <https://www.repwaterparks.com/>
- **SG1 Water Consulting Ltd.(“SG1”)**: Darren Shepherd, Edmonton, AB, <https://sg1water.ca/>

These specialists are acting on behalf of the *Vancouver Island Whitewater Paddling Society* (“*VIWPS*”) to provide engineering input regarding instream user safety and the potential for incorporating recreational amenities into the proposed design of the weir project.

Please see, attached, the commissioned report from the engineers, and our summary of that report.

Key Points in Brief:

1. The proposal to create one or two playwaves immediately below the replacement weir IS feasible, within flows dictated in the rule curve.
2. There are two likely locations for a play channel:
 - a. Immediately below one of the four release gates. (That gate would need to be altered in order to direct flow appropriately over the wave-feature.)
 - b. Integrate the play feature into the south fishway. The fishway would have to be re-designed. It is possible that this option would actually enhance fish passage.

One additional side-note must be made, concerning our engineers’ report: In completing their report, our engineers visited the site in person, and closely perused Stantec’s designs. They made some very specific comments about the proposed design of the south fishway. (SEE ESPECIALLY P. 2 & 3 OF THE ENGINEERS’ REPORT (attached.)) **Because effective fish passage will be a priority in the new weir, we strongly recommend the CWB take a “sober second look” at this important aspect of the design, as included in our engineers’ report!**

RATIONALE FOR INCLUDING OUR RECREATIONAL PROPOSAL IN THE INITIAL CONSTRUCTION PHASE:

In addition to our proposal to include one or two playwaves in the weir design, other additional valuable features have been requested. These include:

- a walkway across the weir, linking to the existing trail system
- a portage trail around the boat lock
- art work in the design

There has been a suggestion that we should build the weir, as originally conceived, as soon as possible, and delay consideration of additions until afterward, as time, funding, and energy allow.

But unlike the other listed proposals, ours is the only one which would require significant (though modest) changes in the actual design of the weir and river-bed.

There are two reasons why it would be desirable to include our proposal in the original design and construction:

- Disruption to the river: The river will need to be disturbed significantly during the construction of the weir. If our proposal were to be deferred, it would be necessary to disrupt the river a second time. And we believe that would not be desirable.
- Cost Effectiveness: As our project will require minor but specific alterations to the weir, it seems likely it would be more cost-effective to include those alterations in the initial construction.

In addition, the project still awaits the confirmation of the license holder, and the shoreline phase of the campaign will likely take several months. We believe that the addition of our proposal could easily be completed without any delay in the current schedule.

SUPPLEMENTARY -- PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS:

The design phase, included public input through a *Weir Design Survey* AND a *PlaceSpeak* discussion. https://cowichanwupca.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/rpt_cv_weir_design_survey_results_20200721_final.pdf

From the survey, results overwhelmingly support inclusion of *“the outflow to serve as both a fishway and a watercourse” (recreational channel)*.

78% of all respondents are “in favour.” (This includes 59% of residents/local property owners, and 99% of non-residents/non-local property owners.) .

From the discussion, there are TEN pages -- 137 responses -- to the question, ***“Would you like to see recreational opportunities included in the design if possible?”*** Of the 137 responses, 107 are positive.

Some examples:

“A play feature at the weir would be such an incredible resource to teach youth about river features and progress their paddling skills in a safe and controlled environment. The more people who recreate in this area, the more people who will gain an appreciation for the local environment, and will endeavour to act as stewards for the land and environment.”

“Kayaking is an incredibly great form (of) recreation with virtually no environmental impact.”

“...The possibility of creating an accessible location with play features is incredibly exciting. I would love to see a partnership between the district, the kayak community and local interests in creating a park that could serve multiple users and that would promote safe and sustainable waterways use for years to come. Thank you for including this in the discussion!”

One comment, addressing the question, ***“Do you think we should consider a walkway across the weir”*** is interesting:

“A walkway over the weir with a viewing platform overlooking a whitewater park would serve as a destination that would draw locals and tourists to the river...”

. (Recreational paddlers usually don't think of their activity as a “spectator sport.”!!)

SUPPLEMENTARY -- PARTNERSHIPS:

In making our request, herein, we are not sure that the *CWB* really knows who we are and how we fit into the local stewardship community.

We take responsibility for the fact that, for many years, the paddlesport community has taken rivers for granted, and has failed to show up to support responsible river management. We have been invisible!

In recent years, we have rolled up our sleeves, and have begun to do our part in support of local river stewardship. Since approximately 2016, whitewater paddlers have worked hard to support local agencies and current initiatives (including the *CVRD* and the *CWB*, and especially the *WEIR READY* campaign:)

Most of us are not biologists. But we have some practical skills and experience in education, promotion, communication, and youth engagement. Currently, one or more of us:

Sit on the *Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (CSRT)*, *Koksilah Working Group (KWG)* and the *Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society (CLRSS)*

Worked on the committee to plan the *Quw'utsun Heritage River Celebration*; 2017, 2019, 2021; initiated '*Kids' Burns in Boats'* program

Supplied canoes for *BC Naturalists' Convention*, and the *CSRT annual July meetings at Stoltz (2018, 2019)*

Worked for *BC Summer Games*, coordinating a major provincial youth paddling competition (Edmond)

Enlisted paddlers to help with *CWB's Lower Cowichan River Cleanup* (several years)

Enlisted paddlers to help with *CLRSS' Upper Cowichan River Cleanup* (several years)

Donated instructional services as Silent Auction prizes, for several agencies' fund-raisers

Donated coffee and snacks for *KWG* public meetings

Provided technical / on-line services (Edmond) several times to the *CWB* and the *CSRT*

Provided free instruction and gear (Rick) to Stewardship Summer Students (several agencies) to balance their work experience with related recreational opportunities. (Got the Big Dancing Fish into a boat!)

Worked for the *Ad Hoc Coalition of NGOs* in support of the *CVRD* Referendum on Water Service, in 2018 (Rick); provided letter to the editor of local newspaper, the day before the vote

Formed working partnerships with *BC Parks* and *Cowichan Search and Rescue* to promote safety and to mitigate river hazards

Formed working partnership with *the Fraser Basin Council's* youth engagement program

Donated instructional and promotional paddlesport service to the *University of Victoria Kayak Club*, in accordance with sound environmental standards and strict safety guidelines.

SUPPLEMENTARY LINKS AND ATTACHMENTS:

PowerPoint presentation -- https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WEIR-Recreation-presentation_RickBryan.pdf

Minutes from CWB meeting, Sept. 30, 2019, (please see "DISCUSSION," p. 6 & 7) --
<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/DRAFT-MEETING-minutes-Sept-30-2019.pdf>

Weir Design Survey Results --
https://cowichanwupca.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/rpt_cv_weir_design_survey_results_20200721_fin.pdf

Engineers' Report and Paddlesport Summary -- (Please see attachments)