


<p>DRAFT BOARD MEETING Minutes</p>	<p>Mon. Oct 25th 2021 9:30-11:30 am Online / Zoom</p>	
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Meeting Chair: CVRD Chair Aaron Stone **Participants:** Tim Kulchyski, David Anderson, David Slade, David Froese, Kristine Sandhu (until 11am), Linda Higgins, Lori Iannidinaro, Shannon Waters. Alison Nicholson. **Staff:** Tom Rutherford, Jill Thompson. **Regrets:** Chief William Seymour, Debra Toporowski, Stuart Pagaduan. **Minutes:** Jill. **Audience members:** advisors, working group members, volunteers, interested public. (Including Barry H, Dave P, Kate M, Ken T, Rosie, Blaise-incomplete list.)

Guest Speakers: Mike McCulloch, BC Government Fisheries Specialist; Genevieve Singleton, Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Co-Chair; Rick Bryan and Edmond Duggan, Vancouver Island Whitewater Paddling Society.

9:00-9:30am – Open conversation/visiting on Zoom.

Meeting materials are available at: <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/meetings/>

1.	Welcome.	Aaron Stone opened the meeting at 9:30am	
2.	Agenda Review / Revisions.	Agenda approval moved by David Slade, 2nd by Kristine. No changes.	Approved.
3.	Review minutes of the September meeting.	Minutes approval moved by Lori, 2nd by Kristine. No changes.	Approved.
4.	Announcements and Correspondence.	Tom reviewed the correspondence and sought clarification from the Board that staff is passing on an appropriate amount of correspondence, relative to the volume of email received daily. Seeking transparency but also balance.	Decision that current approach to correspondence is appropriate.
5.	Public Input	None	Information
6.	Presentation: 2021 Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul	<p>Genevieve and Tim provided a slideshow about the very successful Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul event. They reflected on the experience of working together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genevieve acknowledged the privilege of being able to work closely with Cowichan Tribes on this event and provided a summary. 	Information

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tim thanked the small group of people who provided for everyone and how well it worked. • Qwustenuxun (Jared Williams) was recognized for providing his own smoked salmon so that everyone could have a taste, which is enough. • Tim relayed that the kids ask every year whether there will be a Rivers Day this year. • Tim thanked Genevieve especially. • An estimated 400 people attended. • See the video produced by Shaw TV here. 	
7.	Presentation: Steelhead update and BC Fishery Regulation Q&A	<p>Mike McCulloch provided a presentation to address the Board’s question to the Province about limiting fishing in the upper river to protect fish. See presentation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freshwater fishing Regulation Advisory Committee - Steelhead abundance. Provincially, have gone from thousands to hundreds and now 10s of fish (e.g. Gold River). Lowest abundance ever noted, while Alaskan fishing salmon numbers are very high. <p>See below for details and discussion.</p> <p>Aaron thanked Mike for his information and encouraged him to manage for abundance and health of the ecosystem as he referenced.</p> <p>Mike thanked the CWB for the input and is happy to come back anytime.</p>	Information
8.	Presentation: Paddling Feature Proposal at Cowichan weir	<p>Edmond introduced the presentation and characterized the group’s effort as “trying to get to yes” and looking for CWB’s support in that. Rick provided a slideshow and thanked all the people who have supported the process so far (CWB staff, Leroy at CVRD, Tim and Shannon on community health considerations, CVRD Area E and I for funding, paddlers)</p>	<p>Information</p> <p>Next steps involve people working with MLA Furstenau to determine whether funds are available to pursue.</p>

		<p>See presentation here, and discussion details below.</p> <p>Aaron Stone thanked Rick and Edmond for their presentation, and emphasized that funding would need to be found to include the recreation features. He confirmed that members of this Board are supportive and are also members of CVRD Board. He suggested people follow up with MLA Furstenau to research funding opportunities, and that a fully engineered and costed recreation plan would be required. (It was not clear who was offering to seek the funding.)</p>	
9.	<p>Presentation: CWB Watershed Health Target and Indicators Review - Flows Target. Review of Working Group recommendation.</p>	<p>Tom suggested we table this item. He clarified that staff will be looking for suggestions from the CWB members on the Target Working Group's recommendations, and/or their endorsement of the revised Targets. It was agreed that the Board should not rush this discussion as the Targets are our calls to action that define the Board's focus.</p> <p>Alison requested that this be at the beginning of the next agenda because the Targets are important.</p>	<p>Deferred.</p> <p>Start next agenda with this item.</p>
10.	<p>Executive Director Update</p>	<p>Tom gave a quick update that we are working hard on the process to determine a water license management regime for the Cowichan, and the Twinned Watershed project in the Koksilah.</p>	<p>Information</p>
11.	<p>Other</p>	<p>Aaron let the Board know that this will be his last meeting as Co-Chair because his term as CVRD Chair is ending. He called his time leading the CWB a stimulating and invigorating challenge, and spoke of the privilege to sit as co-chair with Cindy Daniels and Chief Seymour. Board members expressed their huy ch q'u's and thanks and that they would miss his leadership.</p>	<p>Information</p>
12.	<p>Adjourn</p>	<p>Meeting adjourned at 11:45am</p>	<p>Adjourned.</p>

Discussion Details

7. Mike McCulloch

- Steelhead are rainbow trout that go to the ocean.
- Migrate out in May and spend 1-3 years at sea. 3000-5000 eggs.
- Mike reviewed the possible steelhead management proposals.
- Cowichan has one of the highest smolt capacities.
- Fry abundance is monitored annually through electro fishing program. Fry densities have been consistently good up until this year. Current marine survival of out-migrating smolts is very low. ~400 steelhead adults estimated population.
- Consumptive fishery historically. Catch and Release mandated several years ago. Hatchery program was initiated with mixed success and terminated in 2006.
- Catch decline doesn't necessarily equate to population decline. Can reflect the skill of fishers targeting the population.
- Mike meets with Joe Saysell annually and considers him a valuable source of information.
- Steelhead abundance is universally down, not just in this river.
- Angling methods are changing – using boats, upper Cowichan River access – bank access was more limited.
- Education recommended for boating anglers to prevent anchoring on redds, managing their impact regardless of regulations. DFO have drafted a sign to achieve that education. This is a short term plan as of last year to address the concerns in Joe's letter, which was not what Joe proposed.
- Cowichan has high productive capacity. Data has supported sport fishery.

Q&A:

Q: David A – Excellent presentation but depressing. Two questions:

1st - If the Advisory body has been relied on for so long and graphs are declining so dramatically, do you have the right model? If you have interest group representation, you will get an interest group result, which is what we see. It's not working well.

2nd – If it's not working, why not ban winter fishing on upper Cowichan and set aside areas where there are redds. If it's not working, why don't we try something different?

A: Mike – very cognizant of angling pressure. Considering closure of angling streams. This is not an insignificant change. Within Cowichan, the proposal was to close the upper river. Fly fishers are better at catching trout than steelhead – steelhead catch is a very minor component. The section recommended for closure would have the most limited benefit. The mode of fishing has changed – more boats having more success - historic data doesn't catch that.

Challenge is also how the trout and steelhead fisheries are interrelated.

Regulations by their nature are imperfect.

Q: David A – It's good to hear you are thinking of radical changes. We are facing a long term downward trend and using the same mechanisms. We can't fine tune regulation but can do straight prohibition. It's unethical to fish spawning salmon in winter. Fundamentally we need to give the river a complete rest during a certain period of time.

A: Cowichan is well above the conservation crisis limits seen in other rivers where bigger changes are being contemplated.

There was a significant increase in angling during CoVid – new fishers, uneducated, with no baseline of what it used to be like.

Q: Tim asked Mike to highlight the issue exemplified by electrofishing result this summer.

A: Mike replied

- FLNRORD looks at fry abundance as an indicator.
- 12 sites. Increasing abundance as we go up the river. Highest abundance is in highest site
- Got a result of zero this summer.
- Unclear whether that was a shift in distribution of spawners (unlikely), or whether fry were pushed out of that area in the heat dome.
- Can usually endure 25 degrees. Disturbing.

Q: Alison – commented that she finds this disturbing. We are using the word “sustainable” but how can this decline be called sustainable? How can the CWB help you make the shift that is needed?

A: Mike – it's dynamic, and there are global changes. Steelhead resilience is high. We still continue to have populations that we believe will bounce back. If we continue to see the trends that we have, we will make significant management changes. Every season is unprecedented now.

Q: David F – said we need to remember to look at the big picture of water flow and temperature in the Cowichan. He added that fly fishing steelhead in the winter is not what is driving the decline. Even where there is no angling, steelhead populations are down. Fly fishing in the upper river is not the big problem.

A: Mike replied that every effort will be needed and they only have a few levers they can pull.

8. Paddling Feature Proposal

See presentation slides by Rick Bryan [here](#).

- In Sept 2019, Rick provided a slideshow here about adding recreational value to the weir through the inclusion of 1-2 smallish waves.
- The steady flow immediately below the weir enables a consistent wave.
- The paddling community raised ~\$9k to hire a company; it took 1 year. The lead consultant in the US couldn't come so they hired SG1 in Alberta. They came to look at the weir and the new

weir plan. They also looked at fish passage and safety features. Rick reported that SG1 is experienced at designing play features with fish passage and they believe the fish passageway could be improved with another design.

The upshot of the engineer's feasibility study is that it's feasible – there is enough flow to create a couple of waves. There are 2 locations they looked at:

- a) Immediately below 1 of the 4 release gates.
- b) Below the fish passage at the edge of the weir. For this option Rick reported that the fish passage would need to be redesigned, but that the engineers are of the opinion that it would enhance fish passage.

Rick said that the group is willing to consider deferring our project but asked the Board to consider:

- 1) Major disruption to the river to construct works. Not good for fish or anyone. If the project can be in the first construction phase, it can all be done at once, with no re-disturbance.
- 2) Fiscal responsibility.

They are looking for feedback and guidance on how play features can be included, and for help and wisdom from CWB about where to go from here.

Comments:

- Lori – agreed that it is cheaper to put the infrastructure up front, and expressed support for the concept.
- Aaron – expressed support for recreation along the river. If we are able to keep to the weir timelines and funding, opportunities are there.
- Alison – asked for a reminder of the status of the walkway over the weir.
 - A: Tom – the process is moving forward and is not considering cold water delivery or an education center currently either. They are just starting to talk about the licensing piece. The scope of that discussion is just about the weir itself.
 - A: Aaron added that the design supports the addition of a walkway when subsequent funding is available.
- Alison – asked how we can make the weir community friendly?
 - Tom – the idea is for retrofits/additions (cold water delivery and education centre) later, but for right now the focus is just getting the structure in place. He acknowledged Rick's point about the efficiencies but the essential piece to allow us to regulate water flow is a big enough challenge.
 - Kate Miller wrote [chat] that the current funding is for fisheries. If additional funding partners are found then they bring those resources.

Rick encouraged the Board to look at the engineers report about the fishway and that he would be grateful to hear back what next steps would be.

- Aaron responded that to find funding, they would need a fully costed proposal for design for all elements, and make those applications to appropriate funders (e.g., senior government or private partners). There is still work to do.
- Edmond - added that MLA Furstenau's office is looking at funding opportunities for this project.
- Aaron – added that at the local gov't level, we would need provincial or federal funding. All funding received so far is about protecting fish but if we can support recreation at the same time, it's better for everyone.
- Shannon – urged the proponents to consider collective projects to look at enhancing human connection to the watershed, building stewardship.
- Tom – said he supports all community engagement features as long as we can include them without slowing things down. It's been over 20 years already. Just getting the license piece right without delaying construction is taking all the time we can find. We need to keep in mind that it's already a complicated process. Tom reminded the Board that his priority as their E.D. right now is to build the weir as quickly as possible, so making it as good as it can be, incorporating all the features we can - without slowing things down. Even if we expedite things as quickly as possible it will still be years before completion.
- Aaron – summarized that members of this Board are supportive and are members of CVRD Board as well. Next steps are to follow up with Sonia [MLA Furstenau] to research funding as a fully engineered and costed recreation plan would be needed. Aaron thanked Rick and Edmond for the presentation.