
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural
Resource Operations and Rural
Development
Cowichan Tribes First Nation

Cowichan Tribes and Province to develop BC's first Water Sustainability Plan

VICTORIA – Cowichan Tribes First Nation and the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) have reached an historic agreement to develop a Water Sustainability Plan for the Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) Watershed.

This Plan—the first of its kind in the province—will be developed jointly by the First Nation and the Province, consistent with BC's commitments to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. It will address significant concerns in the watershed related to water availability, low flows, critical fish habitat, Indigenous cultural resources, and other identified issues.

“Water and water management is crucially important to the Cowichan Tribes way of life,” said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. “The BC and Cowichan Tribes governments are committed to working together on water sustainability for the benefit of the Cowichan Tribes and all British Columbians. This is part of the reconciliation path that we all walk together in support of prosperity for future generations.”

Summer flows in the Koksilah River have been exceptionally low in recent years at times when demand for water is the greatest. This threatens the survival of fish populations and the aquatic ecosystem. In August 2019 and 2021, Ministerial Orders under the Water Sustainability Act were issued in the watershed, curtailing crop irrigation and other water uses in the watershed to protect fish populations.

Cowichan Tribes and FLNRORD reached consensus to pursue a Water Sustainability Plan after two years of collaborative work to scope options and opportunities to better manage the Koksilah watershed. The parties' recommendation was supported through both Chief and Council Resolution and Ministerial Order.

“Cowichan Tribes is pleased to see this important step towards taking care of Xwulqw'selu Sta'lo',” says Cowichan Tribes Chief Lydia Hwitsum. “We are already seeing damage from drought and flooding – to salmon and wildlife, homes, cultural resources, the economy, and the whole community. A Water Sustainability Plan helps us plan for the future, while restoring and rebuilding the watershed to a healthier condition. As Quw'utsun Mustimuhw, we have always had that responsibility to care for the land and water. We are committed to working with government and all the affected people in the community.”

The Ministry and Cowichan Tribes agree to jointly oversee and participate in the long-term planning process as equal authorities with distinct legal traditions and responsibilities. The partners are committed to early, transparent, and ongoing engagement with local residents, businesses, the wider community, decision makers, and water and land users throughout the planning process.

Quick Facts:

- Water Sustainability Plans are a tool in the Water Sustainability Act (sections 64-85) that can be developed to prevent or address conflicts between water users, conflicts between the needs of water users and environmental flow needs, risks to water quality, and risks to aquatic ecosystem health.
- The Koksilah Water Sustainability Plan is the first to be initiated since the Water Sustainability Act came into force in 2016.
- In August 2019 and August 2021, ministerial orders under the Water Sustainability Act were issued to specific water users (including surface and groundwater licensees, and unlicensed groundwater users) to stop using water, in an effort to help protect fish populations.

Links:

- [Recommendations Brief](#)
- Order of the Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/mo/mo/m0008_2022
- WSP Scoping Initiative Background and Reports: <https://www.koksilahwater.ca/wspscoping>
- 2020 Interim Letter of Agreement news release: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020FLNR0015-000248>

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