



# Cowichan Tribes

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## BC's First Water Sustainability Plan Being Developed for Koksilah Watershed

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**Duncan, BC**

Cowichan Tribes 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.

"Cowichan Tribes is pleased to see this important step towards taking care of Xwulqw'selu Sta'lo'," says 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."

The plan will be the first of its kind in BC. It will address significant concerns in the watershed related to water availability, low flows, critical fish habitat, Indigenous cultural resources, and other identified issues.

"This is a new approach to watershed management, and Cowichan Tribes is excited to be embarking on this important work with the Province," explains Larry George, Director Land and Self Governance. "We are grateful for the leadership shown by Chief and Council."

"A Water Sustainability Plan helps us plan for the future, while restoring and rebuilding the watershed to a healthier condition," says Chief Hwitsum. "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."

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 nearly two years of scoping options and opportunities to better manage the Koksilah watershed collaboratively.