



Setting the Course to 2033

Background and Context

The Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) is a local governance entity established as a partnership between the Cowichan Tribes (CT) and the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) dedicated to the promotion of water and watershed sustainability in the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed.

CT and the CVRD have been working together since 2010 to advance whole-of-watershed health, demonstrating a commitment to moving together down the path of reconciliation. Over the past 12 years, the CWB has been recognized locally, provincially, and nationally for our innovative and effective partnership approach to working towards a positive water future in the face of climate change by combining both strong western science and the knowledge and teachings of the Quw'utsun people who have governed and stewarded the watershed for millennia.

In 2017-18, the CWB partnered with the BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative to carry out a series of "Cowichan Watershed Co-Governance Conversations" involving CWB members and other key elected officials and senior staff from Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD. These consultations resulted in the update of the [CWB Governance Manual](#) with a focus on 5 principles:

Partnership, Representation, Watershed Emphasis, Transparency, and Nutsamatkwsyaay'usthqa' (coming together as a whole to be stranger as partners in the watershed).

A framework agreement called [Pathways and Partnerships](#) was also produced to summarize the discussions and areas of agreement on future direction. Significantly, this process resulted in the inclusion of increased Hul'qumi'num language and perspectives, as well as a Recognition Statement recognizing and supporting Indigenous authority in the watershed.

Rationale for Revisiting the Mandate and Priorities of the CWB

The CWB is currently in a time of transition, which makes it an ideal time to revisit, re-affirm and build upon the outcomes of the 2017-18 Co-Governance Conversations and "Set the Course" for the next decade.

The local and provincial "waterscape" has shifted significantly over the past 5 years.

- We now have a [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) in BC.
- A [Cowichan Water Use Plan](#) has been created and endorsed by the CWB and our foundational partners.
- The CVRD now has a dedicated [Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Service](#) which did not exist prior to 2019.
- Significant progress has also been made on the landmark [Koksilah Water Sustainability Plan](#) that the CWB helped to coordinate based on its co-governance experience and principles.

In addition to changes in the waterscape, there have been changes to the CWB membership and senior staff in the intervening years, as well as changes to senior staff at CT and CVRD. Tom Rutherford has stepped back from his role as Executive Director to lead some of the CWB's priority projects, and we have welcomed new capacity in the CWB's new Business Manager, Lisa Maria Fox.

We feel that this is an ideal opportunity for CWB members and senior staff from both foundational partners to collectively review and re-affirm the purpose, mandate, and priorities of the CWB to set the course for the future.

Setting the Course Facilitator

Jana Kotaska is trained as an ecologist and environmental scientist and began her career facilitating planning processes and advancing environmental protection for local governments. She started working for First Nations in 1998, when she became the Environmental Advisor at Cowichan Tribes and then the Forestry and Wildlife Consultant for the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group. She returned to school to complete a PhD on reconciliation and resource management, and has since used her planning, facilitation, and analytical skills to support Indigenous governance, protection, and restoration of ecosystems up and down the BC coast. She lives in the Cowichan watershed, where she co-owns a certified organic mixed farm.

Timeline and Process

In November, the staff of the CWB and Jana will be engaging elected officials and senior staff from Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD, as well as public and appointed members of the CWB, the stewardship community, and advisors to the CWB.

Initial engagement in the process will consist of short online or in-person interviews or focus groups with key staff and advisors, and a short survey with watershed stewards to understand how people view the role of the CWB and their priorities for the partnership going forward.

Feedback received in these sessions will inform the structure and content of a two-day workshop in late November to engage in a strategic planning process for the CWB.

We anticipate providing a report to the January 2023 CWB Meeting and incorporating the results of this important work into the 5-year business plan of the CWB starting in 2023.

Important Dates:

- Nov 1-10 Short Focus Groups, Interviews, and Survey
- Nov 29-30 In-Person Workshops at Siem Liem Gym, Cowichan Tribes
- Jan 30 Presentation to the Cowichan Watershed Board

For more information on this initiative, please contact:

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