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## Sustainable protection of the Cowichan Estuary

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Goetz Schuerholz <taesco@shaw.ca>

29 December 2022 at 03:14

To: jesse.patterson@gov.bc.ca

Cc: Kate Miller <Kate.Miller@cvrd.bc.ca>, dave.preikshot@northcowichan.ca, Jill Thompson <jill@cowichanwatershedboard.ca>, Bethany.Coulthard@cowichantribes.com

Hello Jesse,

Unfortunately we have not met yet during the past year to introduce CERCA to you as the new Head of the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Committee. There are several issues and opportunities related to the Cowichan Estuary which CERCA would like to bring to the attention of the CEEMC. Failing past attempts to add one or two permanent representatives of local stakeholders (i.e. environmental groups actively pursuing restoration and conservation of the Cowichan Watershed and Cowichan Estuary) to the CEEMC, we would like to at least periodically interact with the CEEMC to make sure our voices are heard and acted upon.. Against this background CERCA in cooperation with other local citizen groups would like to make a presentation to the CEEMC and discuss Key issues of concern preferably in March 2023.

It is widely recognized that estuaries are the most important marine ecosystems, at the same time the most threatened in BC. They are totally under-represented in Canada's Protected Area system.

**As a signatory to the Agreement reached by 200 Nations at the recent Biodiversity Summit hosted by Canada in Montreal in December 2022, Canada pledged to place 30% of its marine- and 30 % of its land areas under strict protection for biodiversity conservation, a challenge to be met nationally, provincially and locally!**

For obvious reasons estuaries should be the first to qualify under this agreement. The Cowichan Estuary, considered one of the most important along BC's Coast, would be a prime candidate to be fully protected and its ecological integrity be restored. It would be prudent for the CCEMC to jointly with Cowichan Tribes, the CVRD, North Cowichan and local groups such as CERCA to be proactive, spearheading a movement to place the entire estuary under protection.

Unfortunately, the CEEMC under leadership of your predecessor, supported the application by the Lessee of six Crown Leases in the estuary to be re-zoned for industrial metal manufacturing although the Leases were allocated to the storage and shipment of lumber only. This should never have happened. The Leases in question should have been rescinded and re-zoned for conservation management as stipulated by the Cowichan Estuary Environmental

Management Plan. The re-zoning in favour of metal manufacturing was actively promoted by the former Area Director of Area D which includes the Westcan Terminal and the southern section of the estuary. At the time the same director was a Key member of the CEEMC. In preparation of the re-zoning this person publicly stated repeatedly that in exchange for the approval of the re-zoning application by the CVRD the long-abandoned Crown Lease 103103 would be re-zoned to conservation management. This did not happen. The re-zoning was approved unconditionally by the CVRD Board **supported by the CEEMC**.

In light of the Agreement reached by 200 Nations at the Biodiversity Summit to set aside 30% of marine ecosystems and to restore damaged ecosystems it would be prudent to start with the return of Lease 103103 to be rescinded and re-zoned for wildlife habitat management. This would be in compliance with the stipulation of the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan that all Crown Leases not any longer used be returned to conservation management. Since Lease 103103 covers most of the only existing eelgrass meadow left in the estuary, it would be even more important to convert this Lease for the sustainable protection of the eelgrass meadow, so vital to life in the estuary. .

Please find attached a brief status report on eelgrass in the Cowichan Estuary drawing attention to Key reasons for its disappearance .

Looking forward to your response and wishing you a Happy New Year and CERCA a better year for the estuary,

*Goetz*

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Dr. Goetz Schuerholz

Conservation Ecologist

**Chair**



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We gratefully acknowledge that we live, work & create on the unceded lands of the Malahat, Ts'uubaa-asatx, Quw'utsun, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, & Lyackson Peoples.

*"We burn Carboniferous-era fossil fuels to melt Pleistocene-era ice to determine Anthropocene future climates" (Robert Macfarlane)*



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