



Dr. Shannon Waters, Cowichan region's medical health officer, on a field tour above Cowichan Lake. (Cowichan Watershed Board photo)

Why “Weir” Ready: with Dr. Shannon Waters

This is part one of a feature series by the Cowichan Watershed Board

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Why “Weir” Ready

This is part one of a feature series by the Cowichan Watershed Board delving into the question of how the Cowichan River's low water flows affect residents in our community, and why more and more people are saying “Weir Ready” to replace the Cowichan River weir with a future-friendly model. More info at weirready.ca

Who are you?

Dr. Shannon Waters, Medical Health Officer for Cowichan Region, of Hul'qumi'num ancestry from the Stz'uminus First Nation, Cowichan Watershed Board member.

What is Your Connection to Cowichan River?

My connection extends generations upon generations through my ancestors. I have the privilege, honour and challenge of working to support health and well-being in my home territory. An Indigenous perspective of health includes the health of the watershed, rounding out my perspective as Medical Health Officer for the region.

Why do low river flows matter in your life?

Low river flows affect our collective well-being.

At a fundamental level the lake and river flows directly affect the drinking water source for some people in our region — water is integral to life.

As well, the Cowichan River and watershed touches the lives of all within the valley through means such as supporting food security (for example salmon); being a place for recreation/solace/cultural practices and therefore supporting physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health; and supporting income security for those whose jobs are connected with the river. There is a mounting body of evidence that access to nature is beneficial to our well-being, especially our mental health — one of the areas of highest burden when looking at the population overall. Our environment, including the river and the watershed, can be valued as part of our mental health infrastructure.

We can start to look at the river and how it's flowing as being part of our barometer of overall health.

What are your views on replacing the weir at Lake Cowichan to support better river flows?

Replacing the weir can support our collective well-being. I view our disrupted environment as the most significant threat to our health. Addressing this can seem overwhelming and beyond the scope of what we can do. Here in Cowichan, we have the infrastructure and the natural topography to have a weir to pool water when we have more precipitation to help at the times when it's drier and hotter. It will require effort, money, and structural change, but it's something we can collectively support to help us adapt to even bigger changes and health impacts that are coming in times ahead.

Last words:

The river has given to my family for generations. This is one way I can give back.



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