



Rick Bryan is a whitewater canoeist who paddles the Cowichan River.
(submitted)

Guest column: Why “Weir” Ready: with Rick Bryan

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

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Why “Weir” Ready

This is part four 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?

Rick Bryan, retired educator and mental health specialist; now a whitewater canoeist, volunteer instructor, and director for the Recreational Canoeing Association of B.C.

What is Your Connection to Cowichan River?

My buddies and I spend many happy days paddling the Cowichan River. “The Cow” is truly a unique gem. It can be paddled in its entirety from Cowichan Lake to tidewater; it’s the only river on southern Vancouver Island that can be paddled 12 months of the year, and it’s the warmest of our local rivers.

Why do low river flows matter in your life?

Understanding river flows is essential for both enjoyment and safety for river paddlers. Low flows, like we’ve seen in recent summers, mean that the Cow isn’t really prime for paddling during dry summer months. Even tubers bump and scrape as they float down the river. But paddlers are also ecologists. We know that declining stocks of fish, and other species, are threatened by abnormally-low river levels, as are industrial, agricultural, commercial, and domestic river users. We care about everything that comprises the river’s ecosystem. We also know that climate change is real, and it’s having an increasingly negative impact on our river, and on all the people who rely on it. I look toward a future when all river users become recognized as partners in river management, so we can all work together to meet everyone’s needs.

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

The paddle sport community was active in supporting the CVRD’s referendum last fall on local watershed management. We also strongly support the current plans for a new weir on the Cow, thanks to the hard work and outstanding results of the Public Advisory Group which developed parameters for the weir replacement. While the

paddling community wasn't involved in that step, we look forward to presenting some minor suggestions that could improve local recreational opportunities before the project goes to the engineers.

Last word?

The late Bill Mason, said it best: "When you paddle a canoe, you journey with those who have gone before." The canoe and the kayak are gifts to recreational boaters from our First Peoples. If we fail to recognize the importance of this heritage, we miss the essence of what it means to paddle a Heritage River like the Cowichan.

COWICHAN VALLEY CITIZEN