



September 14, 2023

Hon. Nathan Cullen  
Minister of Land, Water and Resource  
Stewardship

Hon. Bruce Ralston  
Minister of Forests

The Hon. George Heyman  
Minister of the Environment and Climate  
Change Strategy

Hon. Murray Rankin  
Minister of Indigenous Relations and  
Reconciliation

Hon. Lana Popham  
Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport

The Hon. Katrine Conroy  
Minister of Finance

Hon. Bowinn Ma  
Minister of Emergency Management and  
Climate Readiness

**Re: Provincial Support Urgently Needed to Replace the Cowichan River Weir**

Dear Ministers:

As co-chairs of the Cowichan Watershed Board<sup>1</sup>, we are writing to request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience regarding the urgent need to replace the Cowichan River weir.

On Sept. 13 the Cowichan River was placed on “life support”, dependent on mechanical pumps to maintain river flows of 4.5 cubic meters/second - the minimum necessary for fish health. To do so, Lake Cowichan will be drawn down to its lowest level in geological time resulting in significant impacts to sensitive littoral lake habitats. If significant rain does not fall within 49 days, the provincial license will require Catalyst to stop its pumps, and the Cowichan River flows will drop precipitously, stranding salmon in the river.

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<sup>1</sup> The Cowichan Watershed Board is a local governance model created in 2010 to provide leadership for sustainable water management in the Cowichan/Koksilah watersheds, ancestral home of the Quw’utsun First Nation. The CWB is co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District and represents a unique partnership between First Nations and local government. Through this model, Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD work together to advance whole-of-watershed health, demonstrating a commitment to moving down the path of reconciliation.

Earlier this summer, the Cowichan River experienced a significant fish kill, with an estimated tens of thousands of salmon and trout juveniles and adults perishing. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has determined that the cause was likely the cumulative stress associated with high temperatures and low water flows. Flows on that day were also 4.5 cubic meters per second. On September 11th, Catalyst mill's weir manager reported that the discharge from the lake had fallen to the lowest level recorded in the past 65 years.

This is a cross-ministry situation, with relevance to each of your Ministries. Building a higher weir at Lake Cowichan is essential for climate change adaptation, wild salmon survival, Indigenous food sovereignty, economic security, recreation, culture, and tourism. A new governance framework for the weir will also demonstrate respect for Cowichan Tribes legal rights and advance reconciliation.

The Cowichan River has BC and Canadian Heritage status and is deserving of all the support we can offer. The salmon populations it sustains have provided physical, cultural, and spiritual sustenance for the Quw'utsun people for millennia. As local partners we have made strong progress to advance this project, including strengthening local governance and partnerships, completing significant and award-winning technical and engineering designs and studies, and securing conditional federal infrastructure funding which is contingent on matching funds.

We acknowledge the early funding the Province has provided for this project through the BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund and the efforts of WLRS and MoF staff. However, safeguarding the future viability of the Cowichan River wild salmon ecosystem will only succeed with strong provincial partnerships and resources. Due to the urgency of this situation and the ready opportunity to address it, we request meetings, either jointly or individually, with each of you at your earliest convenience to discuss the necessary provincial support to move this project forward.

We are truly in crisis mode and the situation has attracted significant national and international media. Every year that we delay compounds the ecological, cultural, and economic costs.

We look forward to meeting with you.

Respectfully,



Chief Lydia Hwitsum  
Co-Chair Cowichan Watershed Board  
Cowichan Tribes



Chair Aaron Stone  
Co-Chair Cowichan Watershed Board  
Cowichan Valley Regional District

Copied via email:

The Honourable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia  
MLA Fin Donnelly, Parliamentary Secretary for Watershed Restoration  
MLA Sonia Furstenuau, Cowichan Valley  
MLA Doug Routley, Nanaimo-North Cowichan  
MP Alistair MacGregor, Cowichan-Malahat-Langford  
Lori Halls, Deputy Minister, Land, Water and Resource Stewardship  
Doug Caul, Deputy Minister, Office of the Premier  
Kevin Jardine, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Adaptation  
Tara Richards, Deputy Minister, Emergency Management and Climate Readiness  
James Mack, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship  
Sharon Hadway, Regional Executive Director, West Coast Operations, MoF  
Lana Miller, Director of Water Sustainability, WLRS  
Dana Thorne, A/Chief Administrative Officer, Cowichan Tribes  
Larry George, Director, Lands and Self Governance, Cowichan Tribes  
Danielle Myles Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer, CVRD  
Clayton Postings, General Manager, Strategic Services, CVRD  
Jill Thompson, Interim Executive Director, Cowichan Watershed Board  
Tom Rutherford, Director, Strategic Priorities, Cowichan Watershed Board