

**COWICHAN WATERSHED BOARD**  
**TARGETS WORKING GROUPS**

**Terms of Reference (draft)**  
**September 2023**

**1. Introduction**

The Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) is a local governance entity created in 2010 to promote water and watershed sustainability in the Cowichan/Koksilah watersheds, ancestral home of the Quw’utsun people. Co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the CWB 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.

Water has provided the critical vehicle to support this partnership and the opportunity to learn from each other respectfully while working towards improving the health of the watershed. The Board has an enviable track record of planning and implementing technical work, creating a culture of water conservation, promoting science-based advocacy, and implementing respectful community-based solutions.

To support this work, measurable Indicators were developed for seven aspirational Targets that once reached will demonstrate watershed health.

Five Working Groups were originally established to assist in this pursuit of the Board. The following are the terms of reference for the Working Groups.

“If the people who live in a watershed are more involved in decision making, better outcomes might be achieved.”

*Cowichan Co-Governance Workshop  
Participant*

Targets are established for Fish Health, Water Flows, Riparian Health, Water Quality and Estuarine Health, Watershed Connections, and Wise Water Use<sup>1</sup>.

**2. Purpose**

The purpose of the Working Groups to collaborate, share knowledge, make recommendations, and provide technical advice to the CWB in support of setting, reporting on, and collectively working toward achieving targets for watershed health.

**3. Key Responsibilities**

The four active Working Groups, which in two instances link two closely related Targets, are Fish Health and Water Flows, Water Quality and Estuarine Health, Riparian Health, and Watershed Connections (i.e., education and outreach). The Wise Water Use Working Group completed its original project in 2018, is currently on hold, and may be re-established by the CWB as needed. New targets may be established at any time by the CWB.

The Working Groups use their collective expertise to identify, within the CWB

mandate<sup>1</sup>, watershed issues and to develop workable solutions that reflect indigenous knowledge, modern science, innovative policy, and consensus approaches.

With this goal, Working Group meetings provide a forum for:

- information exchange of projects underway or completed;
- developing work plans for shared priorities that address watershed issues, contribute to the local knowledge base, and provide stewardship tools; and
- tracking and reporting out to the CWB on progress being made toward achieving the targets and indicators.

The CWB's mandate is to provide leadership for sustainable water management to protect and enhance ecosystem health in the Cowichan-Koksilah Watershed guided by the Cowichan teaching: Mukw' stem 'o' slhilhukw'tul – Everything is interconnected.

The working groups will also provide technical advice to the CWB when requested.

#### **4. Membership**

Working group members include subject matter experts from Cowichan Tribes, local/provincial/federal government agencies, local stewardship groups, academic institutions, and industry. Working Groups are coordinated by a Targets Coordinator.

For each Target, government and non-government organizations with appropriate expertise are selected by CWB staff. Within each organization, a primary contact is invited by the Targets Coordinator to participate in the respective Working Group. An alternate is also chosen who will attend meetings if the primary person is unable.

Each Working Group is supported, where possible, by an indigenous and non-indigenous Co-chair selected by the Targets Coordinator, with at least one CWB member as part of each Working Group.

The term of membership is indeterminate. Working Group membership is voluntary. If a member has to discontinue his/her/their participation, the Targets Coordinator, with support of the representative organization, will designate a replacement appointee.

Membership responsibilities include:

- Active participation in the Working Group;
- Reviewing materials in advance of meetings;
- Contributing ideas and engaging in topics being discussed at meetings;
- Acting as a liaison between the Working Group and the organization being represented;
- Actively engaging in actions or activities that can support achievement of the targets; and
- Assisting with tracking and reporting on progress toward the target.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/the-cowichan-watershed-board-2/>

## **5. Staff Support**

The Cowichan Watershed Society provides a Targets Coordinator to support the work of the Working Groups. Working Group meeting costs are borne by the Cowichan Watershed Society. Targets Coordinator tasks include working with the Working Group Co-chairs to set agendas, coordinate and run meetings, and to provide regular reports to the CWB and CWB staff on progress made, any recommendations, and funding requests for research and other projects.

## **6. Meetings**

There will be a minimum of two Working Group meetings per year per, approximately six months apart. Meetings will be held in-person or remotely if required. Additional meetings may be scheduled as required at the call of the Co-chairs. Meetings are a maximum of three hours long. Committees may be formed within a Working Group to take on a particular task; committees will then report back to the Working Group.

## **7. Decision Making**

The Working Group will operate on a consensus basis when making decisions on working group issues. The Co-chairs will ensure that proposals being considered are well understood by everyone and that all objections or reservations have been heard. If consensus cannot be achieved, the outstanding issue will be taken to the CWB for decision.

Any decision that leads to a recommendation to the CWB requires a quorum. Quorum is achieved when 50% plus 1 of current members (or alternates) is present.

## **8. Minutes**

Minutes of Working Group meetings will be prepared by the Targets Coordinator, then reviewed and approved by the Working Group. Approved minutes will be publicly available and posted on the CWB website.

## **9. Reporting**

The Working Groups report to the CWB, either in person or in writing, on an as needed basis, and at least once per calendar year. The Co-chairs or Targets Coordinator can provide the report. Members are encouraged to contribute to these reports. Reports are required on:

- Requested information and/or recommendations on watershed issues identified by the CWB; and
- Information to support the preparation of the annual report and to update the management plan if required.

## **10. Conflict of Interest**

As an advisory body, Working Group members must take a precautionary approach to ensure that issues of potential or perceived conflict of interest are clearly identified as part of any proposal process.

## Appendix 1. Cowichan Watershed Board Targets and Indicators

In 2012, the CWB established seven broadly scoped accessible Targets that would facilitate the implementation of the detailed actions in the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan. Many of these initial Targets and Indicators have been revised to reflect current knowledge and concerns, and have been endorsed by the CWB. Others are currently undergoing revision:

### Fish Health (under revision)

**Target:** We want healthy fish populations in the watershed.

**Indicator:** Salmon and steelhead pre-smolt abundance in the Cowichan watershed meets or exceeds target population densities set by DFO and FLNRORD.

### Water Flows

**Target:** Seasonal flows throughout the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds support the needs of communities and aquatic ecosystems.

**Indicator:** Water reserves in Cowichan Lake are managed such that the rate of flow into the Cowichan River meets the soft targets established in the Cowichan Water Use Plan (2018), delivering, at minimum, the following flow regime:

March & April:	25 cms
May 1 - June 15:	15 cms
June 15 - arrival of fall rain:	7 cms

**Indicator:** The Koksilah watershed is managed so as to deliver rates of flow defined as required Environmental flows (E-flows) as per Water Sustainability Planning process currently underway.

### Watershed Connections

**Target:** The people of the Cowichan Valley understand and value that their well-being is interconnected with the well-being of their watershed. Mukw' stem 'o' slhilhukw'tul, everything is interconnected.

**Indicator:** All students in grade 2 participate in at least one place-based learning experience to form a connection to their watershed.

**Indicator:** All students in grade 9 participate in an outdoor place-based experience to help them understand how their well-being is interconnected with their watershed.

**Indicator:** An annual tally is kept to track the overall educational and stewardship opportunities offered to help residents of all ages understand and value their watershed.

## **Water Quality**

**Target:** We want fish friendly, swimmable, and drinkable water in our watersheds.

**Indicator:** E. coli levels in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds are within acceptable provincial and health authority guidelines for swimming and recreation.

**Indicator:** Total suspended solids (turbidity) levels in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds consistently meet accepted provincial water quality objectives.

**Indicator:** Phosphorus levels in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds meet accepted Vancouver Island guidance.

## **Estuarine Health (under revision)**

**Target:** We want to be able to eat shellfish from Cowichan Bay.

**Indicator:** Shellfish from designated areas of Cowichan Bay are harvested for human consumption by 2020.

## **Riparian Health**

**Target:** We want to protect and restore fully functioning streamside, lakefront, wetland, and estuary habitats.

**Interim Indicator:** Area estimates of protected riparian habitats along Cowichan River, Cowichan Lake, and Koksilah River are available.

**Interim Indicator:** Area estimates of successfully restored riparian areas along Cowichan River, Cowichan Lake, and Koksilah River are available.

## **Water Conservation (dormant; completed)**

**Target:** We want Cowichan watershed residents to use water wisely.

**Indicator:** Annual residential water consumption is reduced by 20%, or less than 263 litres per person per day by 2018.

There are 4 Target Working Groups to support the 6 active targets:

- Water Quality, Estuarine Health Working Group
- Fish and Flows Working Group
- Watershed Connections Working Group
- Riparian Health Working Group