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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2024PREM0017-000410  
March 22, 2024

Office of the Premier  
Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

### **Province supports new weir to keep Cowichan River flowing**

LAKE COWICHAN – B.C. is taking an important step forward in drought preparedness by supporting a new Cowichan Lake weir, ensuring the Cowichan River continues to flow and provide a safe and reliable water supply for people, businesses, the environment and wildlife.

“Last year, the iconic Cowichan River almost dried up as B.C. experienced record drought. Only emergency measures and giant pumps were able to keep the river flowing during the rainy season,” said Premier David Eby. “Replacing the Cowichan weir will allow more water to be captured, stored and used when needed. This will keep the river healthy, the fish swimming and better support the people of Cowichan during severe drought.”

The Province announced \$14 million as part of Budget 2024 to support Cowichan Tribes in their initiative to replace the 74-year-old Cowichan Lake weir. A higher weir will allow more water to be stored in Cowichan Lake during winter months and released in a controlled way into the Cowichan River in times of dryness or drought. The higher weir will not raise the lake levels above their annual high-water mark or impact the floodplain boundary.

“People care deeply about our rivers and lakes, which are at the heart of communities like the Cowichan Valley,” said Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. “I want to recognize the hard work of Cowichan Tribes and their partners in the Cowichan Valley Regional District and Cowichan Water Board for championing a project that will bring significant benefits to the area, such as greater food security, healthy habitat for fish, preserved cultural practice and a water supply that people and businesses can depend on.”

The Province’s additional contributions to the Cowichan Weir Replacement Project leverages a previous \$4 million provided to the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) through the BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund, which allowed study of the engineering requirements to replace the weir, and \$24 million already committed by the Government of Canada through a Federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund grant to Cowichan Tribes.

“The well-being of our territory and our people, our Quw’utsun Mustimuhw, is inseparable from the well-being of the Quw’utsun Stal’o. For us, every day is Water Day. Hulitun tst tu qa’ – water is life,” said Chief Cindy Daniels, Cowichan Tribes. “I am pleased to recognize the provincial government for this essential funding to replace the Lake Cowichan weir, which combined with federal funding, will support more suitable water flows for the river, salmon and wildlife, and our communities. We will continue to work with the Province to develop a collaborative and sustainable water-governance model to ensure the health of the watershed well into the future.”

Along with the Cowichan Weir Replacement Project, the Province continues to make significant

investments in drought preparedness and water-infrastructure projects, including:

- expanding the Agriculture Water Infrastructure Program with \$83 million to help B.C.'s agricultural producers improve water management and water supply for crops and livestock;
- launching new water-metering pilot programs in 21 communities, with \$50 million to pilot new tools to better gauge water use and identify leaks, to conserve the water people need;
- increasing the storage capacity and water management at Saint Mary Lake on Salt Spring Island (\$10 million); and
- supporting projects that strengthen and improve the health of watersheds in B.C. with \$157 million for watershed security.

**Quotes:**

**Aaron Stone, chair, Cowichan Valley Regional District, and co-chair, Cowichan Watershed Board –**

“This is a critical step forward in the race to save the Cowichan River and all of the rare and important ecosystems that rely on its health. By constructing a new weir, we are showing the strength of collaboration between Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD in an effort to hold up the ecological, economic and cultural values we share. The river and the fish, plant and animal life it supports are as equally important to all people of Cowichan as the economic and social values it represents.”

**Bowinn Ma, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness –**

“Drought is a sleeping giant of a disaster. Building infrastructure to prepare for the implications is essential to protecting people, communities and the environment. We must proactively adapt to the changing climate, and replacing the weir is a step forward in creating a sustainable future in this region for generations to come.”

**Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –**

“As stewards of the lands and waters for millennia, First Nations have vast knowledge and expertise in ecosystem and watershed management. I want to extend my gratitude to Cowichan Tribes, as well as the Cowichan Valley Regional District and Cowichan Water Board, for protecting the Cowichan River and the communities that rely on it.”

**Learn More:**

For more information about Cowichan Lake weir project, visit: <https://cowichanlakeweir.ca>

A backgrounder follows.

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## BACKGROUND

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### **What to know about Cowichan Lake weir**

- The existing Cowichan Lake weir was built in the 1950s with the capacity to store 97 centimetres of water and designed to meet the industrial and environmental water needs of the time.
- Today, due to the impacts of climate change, including decreased snowpack and frequent summer drought, the storage capacity of the existing weir no longer supports adequate water flow in the Cowichan River in the dry season.
- Low river flows and high water temperatures occur frequently, negatively affecting the health of salmon and other species, exercise of First Nations rights, recreational opportunities on the river, and water supply for industrial and residential users.
- The new weir will allow 70 centimetres of additional water-storage capacity in Cowichan Lake.
- This will reduce the likelihood of low water-flow periods in the Cowichan River and the need to pump water out of the lake to ensure adequate water flows in the river.
- Cowichan Tribes, the CVRD and the Cowichan Watershed Board have been working toward replacement of the Cowichan Lake weir for many years.
- With the involvement of Paper Excellence (owner-operator of the existing Cowichan Lake weir), these partners have completed extensive public engagement, a water-use plan for the Cowichan Watershed, and a weir design and shoreline-impact assessment process.
- In May 2023, the Province and Cowichan Tribes signed a precedent-setting agreement to develop a long-term plan for the Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) watershed, located next to the Quw'utsun (Cowichan) watershed.

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