

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Welcome to our Annual Report!



The Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) is a local governance entity, established in 2010 as a partnership between the Cowichan Tribes First Nation and the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD). Its purpose is to facilitate collaborative management and decision-making to protect and enhance the health of the whole of the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds (collectively referred to as the Cowichan Watershed). We are guided by the Cowichan teaching: Muks ‘uw’slhilhukw’tul – We are all inter-connected.

Over the past thirteen years, the CWB has been recognized locally, provincially, and nationally for our partnership approach to working towards a positive water future in the face of climate change. We do this by combining western and Indigenous knowledge systems;

guided by the teachings of the Quw’utsun people, who have governed and stewarded the watershed for millennia.

Administration for the CWB is provided by the Cowichan Watershed Society (CWS), a registered non-profit in British Columbia (BC).

This report is a key element of the CWB’s commitment to accountability measures detailed in the Board’s [Governance Manual](#). It highlights the major activities, accomplishments, and challenges of 2023. It speaks not only to what we have achieved but how – through collaboration, engaging respectfully, building bridges, and supporting the aspirations of our partners as we work together to ensure a more positive watershed future. Under **Progress on Priorities**, find an accounting of activities, outcomes, and challenges in relation to the goals of our 2023 Business Plan.

Enjoy!

From the CWB Staff Team, Danni, Heather, Tom & Jill

Learn more or get in touch at cowichanwatershedboard.ca

Cover Photo: Rob Wilson, Arcas Media. February 2022. Xwulqw’selu/Koksilah Watershed.

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Reflections from our Co-Chairs

As we reflect on the past year, we are more determined than ever to see all the groundwork we have accomplished on engagement, awareness raising, and planning to move into implementation for the protection of the Cowichan Watershed. With the July 2023 fish die off, the impacts of which will be felt for generations, and pumps being required this fall for 36 days to sustain water flows from Cowichan Lake into the River, the time for action is now.

We made significant strides in that direction in 2023. As Watershed Board Co-Chairs, both individually and together, we were sure to promote the need for provincial funding and a modern governance structure for a new Lake Cowichan Weir at every meeting with provincial representatives. We are delighted to see that in its 2024 Budget, the B.C. government has pledged \$14 million in funding for the project to match Federal funding. We look forward to continuing our discussions with senior government officials to advance solutions around liability protection and water governance.

Additionally, in May 2023, Cowichan Tribes and the BC government signed "S-xats-thut-tst" or the Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Agreement. This is a Government-to-Government agreement to create a whole-of-watershed plan for a more sustainable approach to watershed management in the Xwulqw'selu Sta'lo' (Koksilah River) watershed. This will be B.C.'s first Water Sustainability Plan under the Water Sustainability Act. It will be a collaborative, community-based plan, and a leading example of co-governance with Cowichan Tribes and the Province approaching decisions as equal authorities. The

Watershed Board helped make this possible by supporting the partners in valuable coordination roles, and providing education and communications about the initiative within the broader community.

We would like to recognize all of the current and past representatives and supporters of the Cowichan Watershed Board. None of our accomplishments would be possible without the Board's unique approach and our shared dedication and commitment to the watershed that sustains us. Our table is at the forefront of innovation in co-governance, working as partners who respect one another's authority. This approach has led to better decisions and outcomes for our



RECOGNIZING FORMER CWB CO-CHAIR, WILLIAM "CHIP" SEYMOUR FOR HIS LEADERSHIP. WITH CO-CHAIRS CHIEF LYDIA HWITSUM AND CHAIR AARON STONE. JAN 2023



region. We know that working to resolve the complex challenges associated with climate adaptation, sustainable water solutions, cumulative land use impacts, and reconciliation will only succeed if we take bold action together.

Finally, please join us in welcoming Danielle Paydli as our new Executive Director. Danni is a bright light with valuable experience in water policy advocacy and community development. Her passion for building relationships and the interconnectedness of our place in nature has been greatly appreciated and she has been an important source of support in advancing our engagement with local groups and partners.

Nutsamat kws yaay'us tu qa': We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed.

Chief Xtli'li ye' Lydia Hwitsum
Cowichan Tribes Elected Chief



Chair Aaron Stone
Chair of Cowichan Valley Regional District



Overview of the CWB

Origins: In 2007, prompted by years of declines in the Cowichan River's iconic salmon runs, and increasingly frequent low-flows in summer, the [Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan](#) was created. It benefited from the participation of many local people and organizations working with provincial and federal agencies. Eighty-nine clear objectives were identified, and leadership for each was assigned to a variety of agencies and parties. However, no specific funding was allocated to accomplish the work, no governing body existed to coordinate between the parties, which often had overlapping jurisdictions, and indigenous leadership participation was lacking.

Collaborative Governance: In 2010, sitting Cowichan Tribes Chief Lydia Hwitsum and Cowichan Valley Regional District Chair Gerry Giles brought their councils together to create the Cowichan Watershed Board. The governance structure was anchored by an equal partnership of the two governments, co-chaired by the leaders of each, and by [core Principles](#). In 2018, through a two-year dialogue series engaging senior staff of the partners with CWB members, the [Governance Manual](#) was updated to better reflect the indigenous authority, knowledge and collaborative leadership that underlies the Board's success. An important new Core Principle was added through this process. *Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa': We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed.*

Recognition of Cowichan Tribes' Statement on Inherent Rights

Quw'utsun mustmuhw, ni 'o' ni' tthusht'esulhkws 'itst 'u tun'atumuhw, 'i 'o' hwunst'e. Nilh 'o' thu-it syuw'entst, tun ni' 'u kwthuhwun'amustimuhw 'iwutl'uts' 'i 'u tun'atumuhwtst. Ni' yuxtse'tumtthu Quw'utsun 'u tthu-itumuhw, qa', kw'atl'kwatthuni' spupin' 'u tthutumuhw, ttho' mukw' stem ni' hakwni' 'u tthust'ulnuptst. Kwuthushtun-ni' 'iwststni' yuxtse'tum 'u ttho' mukw' stem ni' ha'kwkwsstthuthi'skwshuli-s. O' nilhtthu Quw'utsun mustumuhw, nilemoxutunstum 'u tthuni' snuwuntewut 'u tthushtunaalhtun, tst. Uwutumtem-us 'i' ni' tstsmem't 'aanlhkwskwun-etewut, hwayumtun'as'aalhtst'ulnup. Quw'utsun Mustimuhw, ha'kwushtst kw' stutul'na'mutsxetsul's kw' shtuhimstthust'ulnuptst. Mukw' stem 'o' slhilukw'tul 'i' nilhni' shkw'akw'umstthusulsuli'tst.

Cowichan Peoples have existing inherent rights. Cowichan as the original Peoples of this territory within which the Cowichan Watershed is included continue the right and responsibility to make informed decisions to manage and organize based on our history and continued connections. As told through time by our ancestors; the lands, waters, seas, minerals, air and all elements interconnected within the territories provided for and can provide a good sustainable life for Cowichan Peoples. Cowichan has never given away this right and continues to govern and make decisions to support the well-being and sustainability of our Peoples and territories.

Source: Cowichan Watershed Board Governance Manual, 2018

Targets: In 2011 the Board's Technical Advisory Committee established '[targets](#)' with the help of Cowichan Tribes, many local stewardship groups and relevant government agencies that had contributed to the Water Management Plan. The targets were intended to fill the gap between the ambitious Management Plan, and the reality of insufficient resources and authority to achieve its objectives. The targets honoured the direction and

intent of the Management Plan while guiding and inspiring collaborative, locally relevant, and achievable progress towards its goals. These targets and their associated measurable indicators have been reviewed and revised over the past 3 years, to establish the next steps on this path. See page xxx and [Appendix B](#).

Working Groups: Four Target Working Groups, comprised of approximately 30 organizations or branches of government, have emerged as the collaborative mechanism by which the Targets are pursued. The Watershed Board coordinates the Working Groups to improve sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources, but it is really the member organizations of each Working Group that must be recognized and celebrated for their contributions towards the Targets. See page 15.

Priorities: Due to climate extremes increasing the urgent need to address low summer and fall river flows, the Watershed Board has also adopted two priority projects to support (Details on page 17):

- 1) replacing the weir at Lake Cowichan to increase water storage and keep the Quw’utsun/Cowichan River flowing at a rate that supports salmon all year long, and
- 2) creating a long-term watershed-wide Watershed Sustainability Plan to address similar critical fish habitat and other issues in the Xwulqw’selu/Koksilah River.



COWICHAN WATERSHED BOARD MEMBERS, STAFF, PARTNERS, AND ADVISORS GATHER FOR A FULL DAY “SETTING THE COURSE” WORKSHOP. SIEM LELUM GYM, JAN 2023. (PHOTO COURTESY OF BARRY HETCHKO)

2023 in Review

10 Moments of Achievement, Learning, Leverage, & Love for The Cowichan Watershed.

(This is an abbreviated version. More details [here](#).)

1. **Xwulqw'selu/Koksilah Watershed Planning.** The work is formally launched as a first-of-its-kind whole of watershed G2G (government-to-government) process between Cowichan Tribes First Nation and the Province. Learn more: www.koksilahwater.ca



CHIEF HWITSUM AND MINISTER CULLEN SIGN THE XWULQW'SELU WATERSHED PLANNING AGREEMENT. MAY 2024.

2. **Fish Kill.** A tragic loss of aquatic life occurs in the Cowichan River. CWB and its partners recommit to better monitoring, management, infrastructure, and local collaboration systems. Learn more: [New York Times article](#).

3. **Pumping.** Catalyst Mill runs a record-breaking 20 pumps for 36 days to keep Cowichan River flowing. Learn more: [SUN FM interview with Tom Rutherford](#)



PUMPING WATER OVER COWICHAN WEIR TO KEEP THE RIVER FLOWING. 2023 (PHOTO COURTESY OF CATALYST PAPER)

4. **Target Working Groups.** Four working groups are refreshed to provide collaboration between about 30 organizations and agencies working on the CWB's primary goals (targets). Learn more about our Targets [here](#).

5. **The Speakers Series** continues to offer quality free watershed education by guest speakers. More info [here](#).

6. **Water Quality Sampling.** Our 2022 Water Quality Attainment Sampling Report (lower Koksilah/ Cowichan Bay) is completed. Find it here [Water Quality Target](#).

7. **Data Sharing.** Progress is made on the difficult question of how watershed knowledge, information, and data can be shared and networked between partners to improve analysis and support better decision making.



GUEST SPEAKER PROF. TOM GLEESON, XWULQW'SELU CONNECTIONS (UVic) WITH CWB MEMBER, DAVID SLADE.

8. **Collaborative Governance.** A "Setting the Course" project provides advice, interviews, and a workshop to highlight goals for the partnership moving forward, clarify and strengthen the governance

arrangement, and re-confirm the CWB's role. Improvements are finalized for the CWB Governance Manual, Version 4.

9. **Stable Provincial Watershed Funding.** The BC Government made its first steps toward creating a Watershed Security Fund. Learn more:

watershedsecurity.ca

10. **Core Capacity Grows!** CWB enthusiastically welcomes Danielle Paydli as its first full time Executive Director! Our annual River Cleanup sees ~100 volunteers remove 2 tonnes of garbage from the lower Cowichan River. Learn more:

<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/river-cleanup/>

<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/about/staff-team/>



MEET DANNI!

Huy tseep q'u to our 2023 funders for making all of this possible: Cowichan Tribes First Nation, Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Real Estate Foundation of BC, Pacific Salmon Foundation, Canada Summer Jobs, BC Freshwater Legacy Initiative (MakeWay), and the BC Ministry of Environment.

DRAFT

Reflecting on Challenges

Annual Reports are an opportunity to recognize and celebrate progress; yet, such achievements are always nested within the context of broader challenges -- the reasons why the organization is needed. In 2023, these challenges, and the corresponding value of the CWB to help deal with them, have perhaps never been more apparent.

1) Massive “Fish-Kill” through 10 km of the upper Cowichan River. An estimated 84,000 steelhead fry were documented by BC fisheries biologists to have perished along with thousands of salmon juveniles and hundreds of trout. Investigations are still underway to understand, and prevent, what happened, but the combination of factors included excess nutrient/algae issues, and the stress of low flows (4.5 cubic meters/second) and high temperatures.

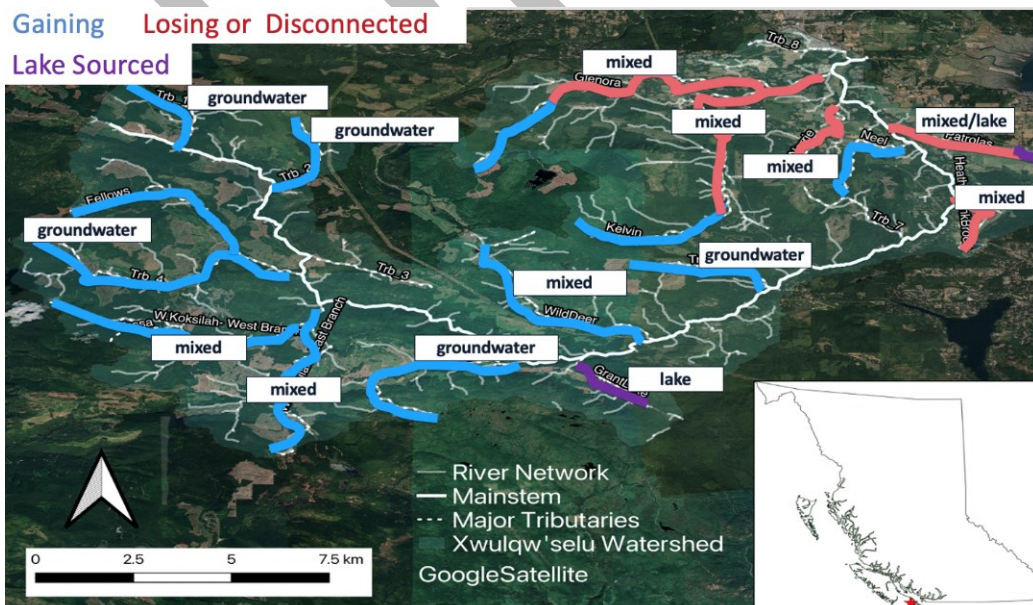


MORE THAN A DOZEN ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES ARE WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE FISH KILL OCCURRED, AND HOW TO PREVENT A RE-OCCURRENCE. MARCH 2024

2) Province-wide droughts resulted in low flows throughout the region, and in both the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers. In the Cowichan River, pumps were needed for 36 days to keep water flowing from Lake Cowichan after water levels fell below the natural outflow. In the Koksilah, first voluntary irrigation sequencing, then a Temporary Protection Order, restricted water use needed by many small businesses. This was done to maintain Koksilah River flows at a minimum of 1.8 cubic meters/second, which is considered a critical fish habitat threshold, but far below ecologically recommended flows. Long-term solutions are being pursued by CWB and partners, in the form of:

- i. a new weir, new sewage treatment, and improved monitoring, response, and communication about low flows in the Cowichan River and
- ii. a co-governed Watershed Planning process in the Koksilah River watershed. (Koksilahwater.ca)

Gaining Lake Sourced
Losing or Disconnected



THE XWULQW'SELU CONNECTIONS PROJECT IS WORKING TO HELP GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GROUNDWATER AND SURFACE WATER IN THE KOKSILAH WATERSHED.

3) **The Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project was announced by Nature Trust and Ducks Unlimited, to restore ecological health and indigenous food sovereignty. It was unfortunately met with strong opposition.** The return of the estuary to its natural state has been called for by indigenous and non-indigenous scientists, academics, and communities for many years in recognition of the very valuable ecological processes that only estuaries can provide, and is a goal supported by the Cowichan Watershed Board (to be confirmed). However, the project comes at the cost of valuable farmland that was carved out of the estuary decades ago, which have been yielding forage crops depended upon by local farms, and a popular walking trail. The loss of forage at this time is especially hard for Koksilah agricultural producers simultaneously facing irrigation curtailments and groundwater licensing implementation. The project was delayed to allow a crop to be grown in 2023 and faces ongoing opposition.



MUCH OF THE COWICHAN-KOKSILAH ESTUARY IS EITHER FARM OR INDUSTRIAL LAND, AND NOT AVAILABLE AS ESTUARINE HABITATS NEEDED BY MARINE SPECIES DURING CRITICAL LIFE STAGES.

4) **Governance -- the work of Reconciliation is not easy. The CWB is increasingly called upon to share what we have learned as leaders in collaborative watershed governance for nearly 15 years.** This is both an opportunity, to define what works here based on local culture, knowledge and values, and a challenge, to strive to always move forward together in a good way. At the same time, the Province has been busy restructuring, creating a new Ministry that has “water, land, and stewardship” in its name! The Province is working to implement new legislation including the Watershed Sustainability Act and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. In addition, Cowichan Tribes First Nation has a new Land Code, and is revising its internal governance procedures, and the CVRD is undergoing Land Use Planning and increasing its activities under its Drinking Water and Watershed Protection function. This is all excellent progress, but it takes time to make change well.



GOVERNANCE ADVISOR OLIVER BRANDES SUPPORTING THE SETTING THE COURSE WORKSHOP (WITH CHIEF HWITSUM). JAN. 2023

5) **Struggling non-profits.** Increasing operational costs have been a challenge for all non-profit organizations in recent years. While the CWS is in a stronger core position this year, some of the grassroots groups we all depend upon to do the ‘on-the-ground’ work of watershed stewardship, restoration, protection and understanding, are having capacity struggles.

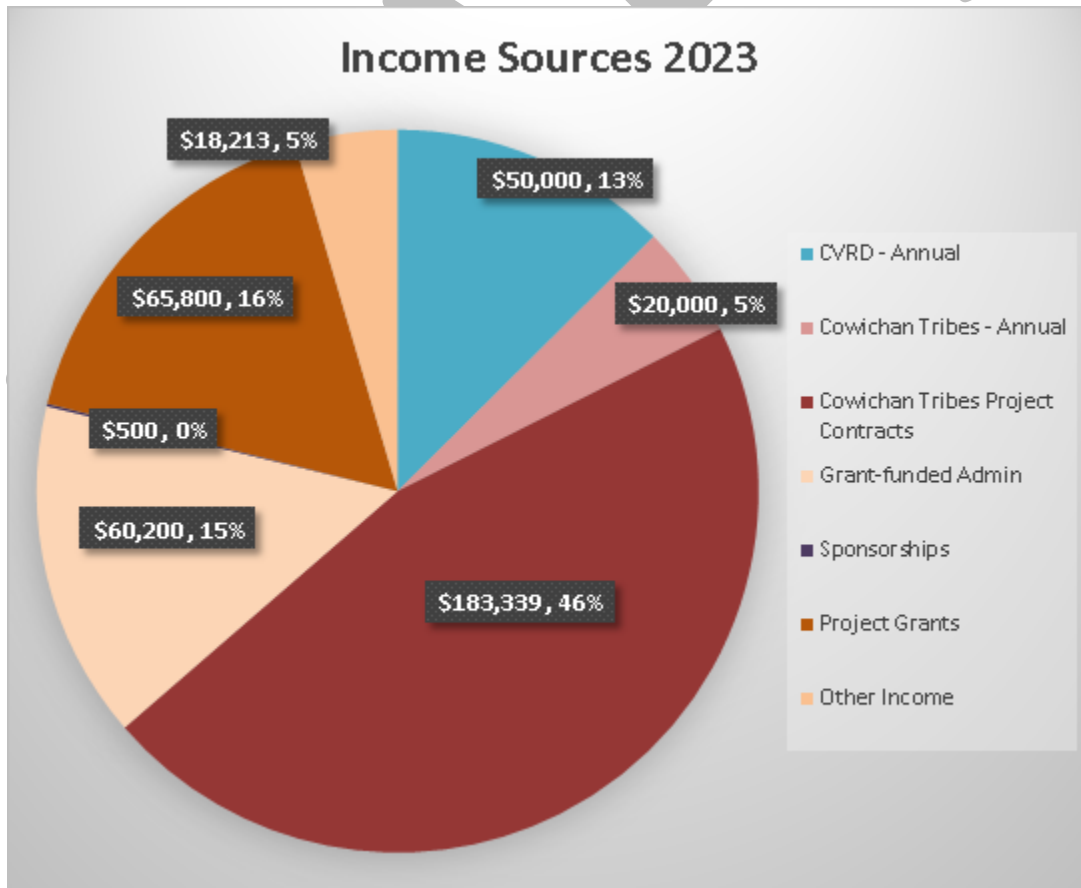
Financial Summary

Financial Support for CWB activities was received by the Cowichan Watershed Society from:

- Cowichan Tribes First Nation, including both core funding and contracts for CWB to provide support to projects lead by the Nation (Xwulqw’selu Watershed Sustainability Planning, Water Quality Testing, and Data Sharing projects).
- Cowichan Valley Regional District – core funding
- Real Estate Foundation of BC 3-year grant.
- Pacific Salmon Foundation internship grant.
- Ministry of Environment contribution agreement (Water Quality Testing)

“Grant funded admin” reflects a 10-15% administration portion of grants/contracts

Generous in-kind support is invaluable to the financial viability of the CWB, with dozens of collaborations leading to greater progress for our watershed(s) than any of us could achieve on our own. Please see Appendix C for details of the many in-kind contributions of community members, Governments, businesses and organizations.



2023 BUDGET	BUDGET		ACTUALS	BALANCE
CORE BUDGET	AGM Approved	Mid Year Update/ Projection	January 1 - December 31	Budget to Actuals (based on mid-year Projection)
REVENUE* Excluding Project Grants				
CVRD Annual Contribution	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	\$0.00
Cowichan Tribes Annual Contribution	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$0.00
Sponsorships / Other Income	\$2,500.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
GST Return	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$10,048.50	\$5,048.50
Grant-funded Admin	\$37,950.00	\$39,450.00	\$40,450.00	\$1,000.00
REFBC Donation	\$27,000.00	\$27,000.00	\$27,000.00	\$0.00
Interest Income	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,575.25	\$1,075.25
Total Core Revenue	\$142,450.00	\$143,950.00	\$151,073.75	\$7,123.75
EXPENSES* Note that other expenses are allocated to Project budgets when grants are available.				
Professional Fees				
Accounting and Legal	\$7,500.00	\$7,500.00	\$6,300.00	\$1,200.00
Managing Director/Operations	\$28,600.00	\$25,850.00	\$25,803.75	\$46.25
Governance and Finance Manager / Acting ED	\$0.00	\$24,800.00	\$27,406.70	-\$2,606.70
Executive Director	\$33,600.00	\$26,000.00	\$33,225.26	-\$7,225.26
Communications Director	\$19,635.00	\$19,000.00	\$11,788.30	\$7,211.70
Targets & Working Groups	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other Contract Support	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$433.13	-\$433.13
Total Professional Fees	\$89,335.00	\$103,150.00	\$104,957.14	-\$1,807.14
General Administration Expenses				
Advertising, Marketing, & Communications	\$1,500.00	\$1,200.00	\$1,643.29	-\$443.29
Banking and Licensing Fees	\$250.00	\$250.00	\$45.71	\$204.29
CWB Phone Service	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$0.00	\$1,500.00
Email/Websites/Software	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,377.75	-\$877.75
Gas/Mileage/Travel	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$82.98	\$1,417.02
Insurance/WorkSafe/Training	\$3,500.00	\$3,500.00	\$3,359.41	\$140.59
Meeting Expenses	\$4,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,240.29	-\$240.29
Printing and Office Supplies	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$221.76	\$278.24
Office & Material Storage Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Contingency 5% of GR	\$7,122.50	\$7,197.50	\$4,903.89	\$2,293.61
2022 Over Budget (Projects) Carryover		\$0.00	\$3,323.29	-\$3,323.29
Total General Administration Expenses	\$21,372.50	\$20,147.50	\$19,198.37	\$949.13
Core Programs Expenses				
Remove REFBC Donation (move to Savings for Pr	\$27,000.00	\$24,500.00	\$24,500.00	\$0.00
River Cleanup Costs (marketing, supplies, honor	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,418.24	\$581.76
Xpey event	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	-\$1,000.00
Honouraria/Volunteer Appreciation	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$500.00
Total Core Program Expenses	\$29,500.00	\$27,000.00	\$26,918.24	\$81.76
Total Core Expenses	\$140,207.50	\$150,297.50	\$151,073.75	-\$776.25
ACTUAL BALANCE - REVENUE TO EXPENSES			\$0.00	

Progress on Priorities

Are we achieving the objectives in our Annual Business (Impact) Plans? The following pages document progress, outcomes and challenges in 2023, relative to the Priorities for Watershed Health outlined in the 2023-2025 Business Plan. All our Business (Impact) Plans can be found on the CWB website [here](#) (bottom of homepage).

Our 2023 priorities were:

1. Two projects to address critically low river flows – Cowichan Weir and Koksilah Watershed Plan
2. The Board’s 7 [Targets for Watershed Health](#), collaboratively developed through Working Groups
3. Building partnerships and organizational resilience as model for collaborative Watershed governance, and
4. Improving Watershed understanding.

Note that almost all the work documented here was done in partnership, including projects lead by other organizations. This is a report on collective progress towards Watershed health, to the knowledge of the CWB, and not CWB’s achievements alone.

KEY

- ✓ On target or complete.
- ↻ In progress but needs reconsideration or adjustment.
- ✗ Not proceeding.



SUMMER INTERN SHIMING HUANG WITH JILL AND DANNI. PHOTO BY

1. Just ADD Water!

a) Quw’utsun Sta’lo’ Cowichan River Water Supply



Replacing the Cowichan Lake weir to mitigate the growing impacts of climate change and land use issues remains the Board’s top priority. The Board plays a supporting, convening, and advising role in these processes, supporting the lead partnership of Cowichan Tribes, CVRD, and Paper Excellence (Crofton mill), as well as the Province and the stewardship community to keep moving in the same direction to address low flows in the Cowichan River. More information at <https://cowichanlakeweir.ca/> and <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/weir-ready/>

“If the new dam were in place in 2023, there would have been no need to use pumps to sustain 7 cms all summer –as we were at or below 7 cms for 124 days in 2023.”

Brian Houle,
Environment Manager
(and weir manager) for
Catalyst Paper.
Presenting to CWB
Meeting, October 2023

Stated Objectives for 2023-2025

- ✓ Weir reconstruction begins to add 70 centimeters of height and improve water storage capacity.
- ✓ Collaborative management approach to managing critical water flow infrastructure and in-season decision making.

Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
<p>Support Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD to raise capital funds.</p>	<p>CWB CoChairs worked together repeatedly throughout 2023 to prioritize the need to fund the weir in their communications with BC Ministers. (~10-12 separate instances).</p> <p>The partners finished 2023 with assurances from the BC Government that capital funding for the weir was a priority. (Update: \$14 Million announced in February 2024, matching previous \$24Million Federal commitment to Cowichan Tribes)</p>
<p>Support development of Joint Works Agreement and provincial responsibilities.</p>	<p>By the end of 2023, the BC Government had signaled a willingness to engage in an innovative approach to partnering with Cowichan Tribes to allow the weir project to proceed. [Update as above, on March 22 2024, Premier Eby echoed that commitment during his announcement at Lake Cowichan.]</p>

<p>Secure a conservation water license.</p>	<p>License application expected to move forward in 2024, contingent on the above.</p>
<p>Support public engagement and communicate the need for this project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society mounted a successful letter writing campaign. • Many allies and groups reached out to the Provincial Government to urge funding of the weir (e.g. Cowichan Lake and River Stewards, Code Blue, Friends of Cowichan River, Sidney Anglers, Cowichan Valley Naturalists, Paper Excellence, etc.) • CWB-VIU “Weir Getting There” Speaker Night. Watch the video here. • Extensive media, leveraging the serious and tragic impacts of low flows in 2023, including the death of more than 84,000 fish. https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/news/
<p>Participate in Technical & Process Advisory Committees (working groups).</p>	<p>Tom Rutherford, CWB Director of Strategic Priorities, resumed the role of coordinating the weir project partners (Cowichan Tribes, CVRD, and Paper Excellence) to make progress on this file.</p>
<p>Other</p>	<p>Extensive unanticipated work became necessary when an estimated 84,000 fish died in July 2023 due to a combination of factors, exacerbated by low flows. CWB took a lead role in coordinating media interviews, and convening a collaborative response to understanding what happened, and a plan to prevent a reoccurrence (2024).</p>

For more information please visit: <https://cowichanlakeweir.ca/about-water-supply/> or <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/weir-ready/>



COWICHAN LAKE AND RIVER STEWARDS’ PRESIDENT, JIM DECK, INTERVIEWED ABOUT THE ‘FISH KILL’ BY CTV NEWS, WITH THE EXISTING WEIR IN THE BACKGROUND. JULY 2023

b) Xwulqw'selu Sta'lo' Koksilah River Watershed Sustainability Plan

Developing a long-term co-governed Watershed Sustainability Plan for the Koksilah watershed is our second priority. This is an historic Government-to-Government process between Cowichan Tribes and the Province of BC. A major piece of this work is to create what will likely be BC's first legally enforceable Water Sustainability Plan (WSP) under the new *Water Sustainability Act*, modelling a whole of watershed approach and respecting the co-governance framework developed between the CoChairs over the past three years. Other elements of this work include cutting edge watershed science and community engagement to inform the planning process.



Photo by Bryant DeRoy

Objectives 2023-2025

- ✓ The Xwulqw'selu WSP and other watershed sustainability measures are created and legally recognized through the joint authority of Cowichan Tribes and the Province.
- ✓ Established model for WSP implementation that uses a whole-of-watershed, indigenous co-governance framework.



CELEBRATING THE SIGNING OF THE XWULQW'SELU GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT. MAY 2023. PHOTO BY CHEYENNE BERGENHENEGOUWEN.

Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
<p>Provide advisory and local communications support to the WSP process.</p>	<p>CWB staff served in specific roles on the Planning Team, including as advisor, providing local connections, perspectives and knowledge, hosting or supporting events, organizing media, and initiating communications tools (newsletter, website revision).</p>
<p>Participate in working groups, and ongoing science studies (e.g. Xwulqw'selu Connections).</p>	<p>Participate as active partners/members in Xwulqw'selu Connections, Low Flow Working Group and the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable.</p> <p>Attend relevant meetings of the Koksilah Working Group, agricultural meetings, estuary restoration, etc.</p>
<p>Provide collaborative in-season drought management as needed.</p>	<p>Actively engaged in Koksilah Low Flow Working Group.</p> <p>Co-organized public information sessions (Online format and Meet & Greet)</p>
<p>Provide administrative support to Cowichan Tribes in their role as Responsible Person for the WSP, as defined by the BC Water Sustainability Act.</p>	<p>Through the Cowichan Watershed Society, managed all funds and contracts for the Joint work of the Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning process under contract with Cowichan Tribes.</p>

For more information please visit: <https://www.koksilahwater.ca/watershed>




CELEBRATING THE SIGNING OF THE XWULQW'SELU GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT.

MAY 12, 2023.

PHOTOS BY CHEYENNE BERGENHENEGOUWEN.


2. Achieving Our Watershed Targets

1. Watershed Targets Renewal

 The Cowichan Watershed Board established [7 Targets](#) for watershed health in 2011. These watershed targets are supported by Target Working Groups comprised of organizations representing all levels of Government, industry, academia, and the stewardship community. In 2019, the CWB began a process of convening its Working Groups (WG) to review the Targets. The WG members discussed their collective progress towards each Target and whether the Target or its Indicators needed updating. The proposed changes were then reviewed by the Board in 2022, with feedback going back to the WG for further thought, sometimes with several iterations. The current Targets, Indicators, and notes about ongoing work are captured in Appendix E.

This is slow but significant progress. The goals that the Cowichan Watershed Board aspires to now are more attentive to Indigenous ways of knowing, including deep commitments to the interconnectedness of our watersheds, and longer time scales. Some of the Target indicators are in flux pending more discussion. The Board and Working Groups are exploring ways to measure what success would look like for Quw’utsun people who remember when the watershed was truly healthy.

2. Support target working groups in the implementation of processes and projects to meet the CWB Watershed Targets.

 Through the support of the Real Estate Foundation of BC, the CWB has been able to sustain a part-time Targets Director, Heather Pritchard, to support the working groups. Each working group met two times in 2023. In addition, committees were established for two of the working groups and met to begin specific projects associated with the target (see below).

Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
Establish Indigenous Co-Chairs of each Working Group.	Indigenous community members are now participating in each WG, but the work to establish co-Chairs, or even Chairs of the Working Groups was discovered to be beyond the capacity of WG members. The WGs are all being Chaired by our WG Coordinator. Instead, the shift to create indigenous-informed Targets and Indicators, guided by Cowichan Tribes CWB members and through input of Council committees, is a way to ensure the work is reflective of Cowichan Tribes’ knowledge and aspirations.
Reactivate a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to inform a Whole of the Watershed Target.	No progress yet due to capacity. Planned for 2024.
Support Working Groups to create action plans supported by the CWB.	Action plans are in place for all working groups though progress on the plan varies: The Watershed Connections WG decided to pursue an earlier developed project (pre-covid), Water Circus, geared toward grade 2 students in the school setting

	<p>to show them through activities how they are connected to water. However, progress was not made due to a lack of capacity within the WG.</p> <p>The Fish and Flows WG established a project idea to begin to explore how to restore fish habitat health in tributaries instead of the main river channels. The intention is to “fix the river, one tributary at a time”. Focus for this group changed in summer due to a significant fish kill event in the Cowichan River, and this project idea has been put on hold while partners re-focused on the Cowichan River main stem.</p> <p>The Water Quality and Estuarine Health WG, established the priority to revise the target and indicators to better reflect indigenous values. This work is ongoing.</p> <p>The Riparian Health WG, established a committee to develop a project plan for a case study that helps the group work toward a shared understanding of important concepts that provide the basis for understanding what constitutes riparian health.</p>
Support the contribution to a compendium or accessible database of watershed and ecosystem science/knowledge to support action on the Targets.	<p>The CWB supported a committee, process, and workshop to explore “watershed information, knowledge and data” (See page 25.)</p> <p>Working with intern Phaedra Douglass, the Targets Coordinator has created a map-based compendium of Water Quality data for the Cowichan Watershed, including regular water sampling locations by First Nation, CVRD, Provincial and NGO teams. It will be posted here when complete.</p> <p>https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/water-quality-target/</p>

Highlights of 2023 Progress toward Targets

Target	Progress/Outcomes in 2023 (by CWB &/or WG member groups)
Water Quality	<p>Finalization of 2022 water quality results for Koksilah, its tributaries, and Cowichan Bay provides information to inform water quality monitoring by the partners.</p> <p>Continued work on studies on contaminants of emerging concern (from sunscreen and bioaccumulation of tire compounds).</p> <p>Annual monitoring in the Somenos watershed has results for water quality, and spawning conditions.</p> <p>Cowichan tribes is working on a water quality target that better represents cultural practices such as shellfish consumption and spiritual bathing.</p>
Estuarine Health	<p>Establishment of a new draft target for Estuarine Health better represents indigenous values.</p> <p>Nature Trust has started work to return healthy estuarine processes on their property in Cowichan Bay.</p>
Riparian Health	<p>Establishment of a committee to identify a pilot project in Kelvin Creek sub-watershed to begin to define terms/concepts such as riparian area, protected, successfully restored.</p>

	<p>Riparian restoration work is occurring along Somenos to help control invasive parrots feather through shading.</p> <p>Riparian restoration work has occurred along Robertson River.</p>
Fish Health	<p>Monitoring indicates Chinook populations were significantly higher while Chum populations experienced a significant decline.</p> <p>Application of a new riverscape habitat restoration methodology was established in Kelvin Creek.</p> <p>Invasive plant (parrots feather) removal and riparian restoration work continues in the Somenos watershed.</p>
Water Flows	See Fish Health
Wise Water Use	<p>This WG is inactive. However, in the Koksilah watershed, the CWB is part of an ongoing collaboration called the Koksilah Low Flows Working Group that works to share information and understanding across organizations about low flows, and seek conservation solutions, including better monitoring, irrigation scheduling, and public education.</p>
Watershed Connections	<p>Publication of the book “Witnessing the Water” by Cowichan Lake and River Stewards.</p> <p>The Friends of Cowichan Creeks program (Cowichan Land Trust) continues to see students restoring riparian areas in the Cowichan Valley.</p> <p>CWB created a “Talk to Us” tent format for outreach opportunities and hosted 2 sessions.</p> <p>CWB hosted 7 Speaker Series events in collaboration with VIU-Cowichan Campus. Attendance ranged from 30 to 70 attendees.</p> <p>Education programs in schools on how to reduce wildlife conflicts occurred.</p> <p>Citizen science projects included a bat inventory, bird counts, forage fish sampling, and ground water sampling.</p>

3. Building Partnerships

Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa' We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed.

Objectives 2023-2025

- ✓ Relationships and functional decision-making capacity of, and between, the CWB Partners for the benefit of the watershed are strengthened.
- ✓ The Cowichan Watershed CWB is recognized by its foundational Partners (Cowichan Tribes and CVRD), water policy leaders and senior governments as a successful model for supporting local watershed governance that incorporates indigenous co-leadership and authority in the watershed.
- ✓ The mandate and priorities for the CWB are updated by consensus and supported by both partners.
- ✓ Watershed authority holders have a trusted and respectful space where they come together and work together for the benefit of the Cowichan Watershed.





Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
Facilitate meetings, provide briefings, create and disseminate messaging, and actively support the communications and meeting needs of the Co-Chairs with each other, external stakeholders, and other levels of government.	Maintained and ongoing.
Where possible, incorporate the use of the Hul'q'umi'num' language into CWB Meetings, programs, and communication and engagement materials.	This is a now regular part of CWB meeting agendas.
Utilize a new Leadership Team model to support regular operations and oversee planning priorities of the CWB.	Leadership Team was an effective tool until an Executive Director was hired.
Convene regular monthly CWB and Society Meetings and meetings between the Co-Chairs.	Monthly CWB meetings maintained; CWS and Co-Chair meetings held as needed.
Create and steward opportunities for relationship building and educational opportunities between Partners.	"Setting the Course" workshop and project collaborations continue to build mutually supportive working relationships.



4. Organizational Resilience

The organizational health of the Cowichan Watershed Board is the foundation for the important work we do.

Objectives 2023-2025

-  The CWB is resilient to changes in, and increased costs related to; staffing, global health concerns, shifting project needs and related funding and granting requirements.
-  CWB activities and way of working are in alignment to the business planning priorities and support the intent of the CWB Governance Manual.
-  Timely and accurate information is provided for decision making on contracts and commitments.
-  Funding is obtained for priority projects, there is consistent budget tracking and timely reporting on grants and funding commitments.

Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
Develop and review progress on priorities, staffing efficiencies, operational policies, and procedures to ensure both resiliency and alignment to the business planning priorities, and the CWB Governance Manual.	A full-time Executive Director was hired in November, 2023, who is tasked with completing these activities in early 2024.
Engage CWB Partners and staff in the CWB business planning cycle and host a “Setting the Course” Planning Workshop.	A consultant was hired to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct interviews with CWB advisors and key individuals from the Cowichan Tribes and CVRD; - Engage other governments, stewardship groups, and industry through a survey; - Plan and facilitate the Setting the Course Workshop; and - Write a summary report. See Draft Report here: https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CWB-Setting-the-Course_Draft-Report_Appendices_Feb-17-1.pdf
Conduct a review of the CWB Governance Manual to incorporate CWB supported recommendations from Setting the Course.	Recommendations from Setting the Course, specifically around the agreed-upon roles of the Board, were incorporated into the Governance Manual, to be passed by the Board in early 2024.
Maintain an efficient in-the-cloud office filing structure for both base operations and all project work.	A Google Drive filing system was created and is utilised by core and project staff. In 2024 we will offer some additional training to staff and enhance our file organization.
Seek to include an administrative fee for all grants and contracts to support core expenses.	This activity is being implemented and increasing our core capacity. Please see the Financial Report.
Implement a requirement for contingency in annual budgets.	This activity is being implemented and will contribute to our financial security. In 2023, the Cowichan Watershed Society approved a contingency of 5% of General Revenue.

We were able to secure approximately 3% this first year but will work toward that goal in the coming year. Please see the Financial Report.



BOARD MEMBERS AT "SETTING THE COURSE"; RECOGNIZING LARRY GEORGE (COWICHAN TRIBES, LULUMEXUN) & KATE MILLER (CVRD, ENVIRONMENT) FOR DECADES OF SERVICE TO THE QUW'UTSUN WATERSHED. JAN. 2023






DRAFT

5. Watershed Knowledge and Understanding

i) Watershed Knowledge, Information, and Data (WIKD)

Knowledge of the watershed is an important part of empowering watershed governance.

Objectives 2023-2025

-  Equal access to the best available watershed related data and knowledge held between decision-making organizations.
-  Updated water quality sampling data is available for the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds.
-  Science and knowledge of the watershed, including scientific data and indigenous ways of knowing is empowering watershed stewardship and sustainability.






Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
Complete and share the results of the 5 in 30 Water Quality Attainment sampling of marine and freshwater sites in partnership with Cowichan Tribes and BC Ministry of Environment.	Completed. Available here . https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/water-quality-target/
Participate in, convene, and help to identify knowledge gaps, including indigenous ways of knowing.	CWB led a series of surveys, interviews, and a spring 2023 workshop, on behalf of Cowichan Tribes, to explore Watershed Information, Knowledge and Data issues and possible next steps.
Conduct a review of existing data management and sharing plans in the watershed; facilitate discussions with First Nations, other governments, and stewardship entities to discuss barriers to data access and potential solutions.	Find the project report and recommendations here .
Create and implement a process to arrive at consensus on data sharing plans or protocols that allow for the greatest possible transparency of information resources to support better decision making and watershed knowledge	



LISA FOX CONVENING A WORKSHOP WITH MULTIPLE PARTNERS TO EXPLORE THE “WICKED” COMPLEXITIES OF, AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FOR, WATERSHED INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE AND DATA (WIKD) SHARING.

ii) Engaging Community in Watershed Sustainability

Objectives 2023-2025

-  CWB's priority projects, including the ongoing transition to indigenous collaborative governance, are supported with clear and engaging communications.
-  There is a broad understanding of the need for change and confidence in the proposed solutions.
-  The culture of caring, and a respect for using sound science and knowledge to support decisions is sustained.
-  Open community dialogue is facilitated, including embracing local knowledge, energy and dedication through face-to-face community activities and events.
-  CWB Working Groups are well supported with communications tools.

Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
Host a Speaker Series; engaging, entertaining speakers on topics of interest to the public, by people with strong expertise on the topic, and relevant to the Cowichan watershed, organized in collaboration with Working Groups and CWB members to highlight their priorities.	Ongoing and successful. 7 events were hosted in 2023. See website for a list of speakers. Coordinating speakers with Working Groups was not possible due to capacity. Most Speaker Nights involved at least one CWB member as MC or Guest Speaker.
Create safe spaces for open community dialogue through face-to-face community activities and events.	2 "Talk to Us" Tents were hosted. More planned for future.
Support communications to share the results of Cowichan Tribes' 2022 Water Quality sampling program.	The Water Quality report was presented to the CWB, Cowichan Tribes, the Water Quality Working Group, and posted to the CWB website.
Animate the Big Dancing Fish - Sth'aqwi; celebrate people working to protect salmon. Share photos/videos to Facebook. Engage indigenous youth.	Efforts were made to seek Indigenous youth to animate the mascot but without success. Sth'aqwi joined Alexander Elementary in its "salmon run" and a Conference of BC Water Collaborators, but otherwise had a quiet year.
Develop communications to support the new CWB Targets.	Not completed.
Scope a volunteer project to build a 'water-shed' on wheels - mobile educational display and CWB storage unit.	Not initiated.
Host Annual Lower River Cleanup (in partnership with others who clean the lake, upper Cowichan River and Estuary).	A very successful cleanup was held in August. 100 volunteers helped remove two tonnes of garbage from Cowichan River and riverbanks.

Continue the Why Fish Need Water video series, with support from Pacific Salmon Foundation and other partners.

The last video in this series is planned for 2024 – “Why Fish Need Us.”



Photos by Barry Hetschko

iii) Core Communications

An important role of the CWB is to build public understanding of, and connection with, the watershed, as well as fostering links and partnerships between the many organizations actively working to restore its health and resilience. This is done through CWB meetings and the working groups, an e-news list, websites and social media, articles in the local newspaper, public education projects. See the [website](#) or [Facebook page](#).

Objectives 2023-2025












- ✓ The CWB is helping CVRD and Cowichan Tribes achieve watershed communications and community education goals.
- ✓ CWB is seen as a trusted source of excellent information and perspectives regarding the health of the Cowichan Watershed. Media seek out CWB for perspective on their stories.
- 🔄 Website content is up to date and reflects the priority work and perspectives of the CWB and is user friendly. Content is easy to search, and an excellent resource for anyone interested in the Cowichan Watershed.
- 🔄 CWB phone, email and mail are monitored and responded to in a timely and professional manner.
- 🔄 Updated CWB graphics and logo better reflect our indigenous partnership.
- 🔄 Our social media pages are engaging, educational and accurate.

Planned Activities	Progress / Outcomes
Maintain communications services for the CWB including responding to emails, writing, editing, report preparation, and official correspondence. Maintain image library.	Maintained adequately.
Respond quickly to all media inquiries to arrange interviews with the Co-Chairs, their designate, or alternatively, with a knowledgeable and engaging local spokesperson.	Approximately 90% of media inquiries responded to; 75% provided with an interview with a Co-Chair or a relevant staff person from CWB, Cowichan Tribes or CVRD. References also made to other partners where appropriate. A media briefing was organized with the CoChairs and 3 CWB members in the summer for local media to ask questions about the impacts of drought on the watershed. Media articles are posted here .
Update and improve website, including adding Projects pages and pages for different parts of the watershed (Koksilah, Somenos, Lake, estuary), and Heritage River section with links to partners.	Some progress made. Projects section is active. Some back-end coding was completed to improve searchability. More work is needed.
Update CWB logo/branding.	Not attempted due to time constraints.
Use social media to build understanding of the need for change, confidence in the proposed solutions, and an open door for respectful dialogue.	Maintained adequately.



BRIEFING FOR LOCAL MEDIA ON DROUGHT SITUATION, JULY 31ST, 2023

APPENDIX A: 2023 Board Members

Cowichan Watershed Board Members 2023					
CO-CHAIRS and PARTNER REPRESENTATIVES					
	Co-Chair Chief Lydia Hwitsum / Xtli'li ye', Cowichan Tribes	Co-Chair Chair Aaron Stone, CVRD	Councillor Stuart Pagaduan Qwiyahwult-hw, Cowichan Tribes	Director Alison Nicholson, CVRD	Mayor Michelle Staples, CVRD
FEDERAL and PROVINCIAL NOMINEES	Photo not available.				
	Linda Higgins, South Coast Area Director, Fisheries and Oceans Canada	David Slade, Groundwater specialist	Dr. David Froese, Biologist, Family doctor		
MEMBERS AT LARGE					
	Tim Kulchyski / Q'utxulenuhw, Cowichan Tribes community member	Honourable David Anderson, Former Federal Fisheries Minister & Environment Minister	Dr. Shannon Waters, VIHA -Cowichan Valley Medical Health Officer	Councillor Kristine Sandhu, Lake Cowichan Town Council	
BOARD ADVISOR: Oliver Brandes, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, University of Victoria					

APPENDIX B: Collaborators & Volunteers - our Watershed Community

The Watershed Board only succeeds through the work, knowledge and collaboration of all four levels of government, stewardship organizations, academic researchers, local business supporter and others. It is impossible to list everyone who helps but in 2023 we especially want to thank the following, with apologies to anyone we missed!

TARGET WORKING GROUP MEMBER ORGANISATIONS, DELEGATES	
Fish & Flows	CWB (Tim Kulchyski, Tom Rutherford), Cowichan Tribes (Tim), CVRD (vacant), BC Min. Forests (Mike McCulloch, Jaro Szczot), Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Kevin Pellett, Karalea Cantera), Friends of Cowichan River (Joe Saysell), Catalyst Mill (Brian Houle), Mosaic (Dave Belleznay), BC Conservation Foundation (Jeremy Damborg), Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society (Dave De Pape, Parker Jefferson), Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (Paul Gowland), Other (Cheri Ayers).
Water Quality and Estuarine Health	CWB (Tim Kulchyski), Cowichan Tribes (Tim), CVRD (Vanessa Thomson), BC Min. Environment (Rosie Barlak), Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre (Pamela Williams), BC Conservation Fdn (Thea Rodgers), Cowichan Estuary Restoration and Conservation Assoc. (Bill Heath, Goetz Schuerholz), Koksilah Working Group (Rodger Hunter), Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (Gina Hoar), Municipality of North Cowichan (Dave Preikshot), Nature Trust of BC (Tom Reid), Other (Cheri Ayers).
Riparian Habitats	CWB (Alison Nicholson), Cowichan Tribes (Tracy Fleming, Cheyenne Williams) CVRD (Sarah Butterfield), BC Parks (Hannah Dobbs), Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (Genevieve Singleton), Mosaic (David Vey), Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre (Pamela Williams), BC Conservation Foundation (Jeremy Damborg, Danny Swainson), Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society (Jean Atkinson, Ken Traynor), Koksilah Working Group (Alison Nicholson), Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (Paul Gowland), Municipality of North Cowichan (Dave Preikshot), Stewardship Center BC – Green Shores (Kelly Loch), Coastal Invasive Species Committee (Jessica Bayley).
Watershed Connections	CWB (Stuart Pagaduan, Jill Thompson), Cowichan Tribes (Hilda Paige, Cheyenne Williams), CVRD (Sarah Butterfield), BC Parks (Hannah Dobbs), Cowichan Valley Naturalists (Bruce Coates), Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre (Pamela Williams), Cowichan Community Land Trust (Stephanie Cottell), VI Recreational Paddling Assoc. (Rick Bryan), Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society (Judy Brayden), Koksilah Working Group (Scott Noble), Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (Barry Hetschko), Xwulqw’selu Connections (Jennifer Shepherd), Wildsafe BC (Todd Carnahan)



VOLUNTEERS

Many more irreplaceable individuals pitched in throughout 2023 in addition to those listed above. For example: Quw’utsun Elders and knowledge holders shared invaluable guidance through many avenues all year round; over 100 people helped with River Cleanup, including a core team who put in extra hours to help with organizing, and keeping others safe and fed on the day; photographers contributed images to capture the people, places, projects, and stunning beauty of the watershed; provincial policy advisors kept helped us with the big picture changes we need; guest speakers educated; the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable’s CoChairs and participants, citizen scientists, and all the volunteers who helped all the organizations listed above to build a healthier future. Huy tseep q’u volunteers!

ORGANIZATIONS & BUSINESSES

Cowichan Tribes First Nation, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Vancouver Island Health Authority – Cowichan Region, BC Government (various Ministries), BC Parks, Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society, VIU-Cowichan Campus, Koksilah Watershed Working Group, Cowichan Estuary Nature Center, Cowichan Community Land Trust, Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society, Quw’utsun Cultural Connections, Vancouver Island Whitewater Paddling Society, Cowichan Estuary Restoration and Conservation Association, Cowichan Valley Naturalists, Friends of Cowichan River, Catalyst/Paper Excellence, Mosaic, Duncan Rotary, Duncan Garage Café, Adam’s Tarp N Tool, Real Canadian Superstore, Island Tractor, All Seasons Services, UVic POLIS Project, UVic Environmental Law Clinic, UVic Xwulqw’selu Connections, MLA Sonia Furstenau and MP Alistair MacGregor.

COMMITTEES

Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable	Multiple organizations.
Cowichan Lake Weir - Technical Advisory Committees	Cowichan Tribes, CVRD, Paper Excellence, CWB
Koksilah Watershed Sustainability Planning Interim Project Team	Cowichan Tribes, Province of BC, Advisors (incl. CWB) (facilitated by Compass)
Koksilah Low Flows Working Group	Province of BC, Water Survey Canada, agriculture and forestry representatives, local stewardship organizations, CWB
Xwulqw’selu Connections	University of Victoria Groundwater Science and Sustainability Research Group, Cowichan Tribes, Province of BC, Koksilah Working Group, CWB

APPENDIX C: Targets for Watershed Health, and Progress Indicators (Revised)

Targets	Original (2011)	Revised (2023)
Water Quality	<p>We want clean water in our watershed. We want to be able to swim safely in Cowichan Lake, Cowichan River, and Cowichan Bay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turbidity levels should meet accepted water quality guidelines. • E. Coli levels should be below guidelines for swimming and recreation. 	<p>We want fish-friendly, swimmable, drinkable water in our watersheds.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. E. coli levels in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds are within acceptable provincial and health authority guidelines for swimming and recreation. 2. Total suspended solids (turbidity) levels in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds consistently meet accepted provincial water quality objectives. 3. Phosphorus levels in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds meet accepted Vancouver Island guidance. <p>Further Revisions Anticipated: Work is underway outside the CWB to develop water quality indicators that reflect indigenous ways of knowing. This target will be reviewed when that work is complete.</p>
Estuary Health	<p>We want to be able to eat shellfish from Cowichan Bay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shellfish from designated areas of Cowichan Bay will be harvested for human consumption by 2020. 	<p>We want to be able to safely eat shellfish from Cowichan Bay.</p> <p>Revisions Pending: This Working Group is working to broaden this target and indicators to a ‘whole of estuary’ goal that also captures habitat restoration for other species.</p>
<p>“Fish Health” OR “Salmon Sustainability” (TBD)</p>	<p>We want healthy fish populations in the watershed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmon and Steelhead juvenile abundance should meet or exceed target densities. 	<p>We want healthy, wild, and diverse fish populations in the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed.</p> <p>Further Revisions Pending: Work is ongoing to capture both Federal/BC and indigenous indicators of progress towards this target, reflecting traditional knowledge/values.</p> <p>OR (below is currently on website)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Indigenous Indicator reflecting indigenous knowledge/values is under development in consultation with Cowichan Tribes.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fish abundance in the Cowichan watershed meets or exceeds targets set by fisheries agencies. [Link needed here]</i> • <i>Chinook, Chum and Steelhead escapement estimates are generated on an annual basis for the Koksilah River.</i>
Water Flows	<p>We want to ensure that Cowichan River summer flows are maintained at levels that support the needs of people and fish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage water reserves in Cowichan Lake such that the rate of flow in the Cowichan River never falls below 7 cubic meters per second. 	<p>We want seasonal flows throughout the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed to support the needs of communities and aquatic ecosystems.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> March & April: 25 cms (cubic meters / second) May 1 - June 15: 15 cms June 15 - arrival of fall rain: 7 cms 2. 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.
Riparian Health OR Riparian Plants? (TBD)	<p>We want to protect and enjoy the benefits of healthy stream, lakefront, and estuary habitats.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of intact riparian habitats protected by 2021. • 10% of impacted riparian habitats restored by 2021. 	<p>We want to protect and restore fully functioning streamside, lakefront, wetland, and estuary habitats.</p> <p>Interim Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Area estimates of protected riparian habitats along Cowichan River, Cowichan Lake, and Koksilah River, and their major tributaries, are available. 2. Area estimates of successfully restored riparian areas along Cowichan River, Cowichan Lake, and Koksilah River, and their major tributaries are available.
Watershed Connections	<p>“Watershed IQ” Target: We want Cowichan watershed residents to increasingly know and value their watershed. We can’t fully value what we don’t understand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Grade 4/5 students are provided with a hands-on watershed experience. 	<p>We want the people of the Cowichan Valley to understand and value that their well-being is interconnected with the well-being of their watershed. Mukw’ stem ‘o’ slhilhukw’tul, everything is interconnected.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All students in grade 2 participate in at least one place-based learning experience to form a connection to their watershed. 2. 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cowichan residents increasingly know and value their watershed. 	<p>3. 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.</p>
Wise Water Use	<p>We want Cowichan watershed residents to use water wisely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce annual residential consumption to less than 263 litres per person per day by 2018. 	<p>We want Cowichan watershed residents to use water wisely.</p> <p><i>Revision Pending - This target and Working Group have been paused since the conclusion of the 2014-2018 Cowichan Water Challenge, and the creation of a new CVRD Regional Drinking Water and Watershed service. (But we still want residents to use water wisely!)</i></p> <p>OR</p> <p>[2023 Update: Due to capacity issues and the creating of a region-wide <u>CVRD Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Service</u> this Working Group disbanded upon completion of the <u>2014-2018 Conservation Challenge</u>. The CWB continues to collaborate on water conservation measures, particularly in the Koksilah sub-watershed, but no new indicator has been set.]</p>

For more information, visit <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/cowichan-watershed-board-targets/>



**OUR FIRST “OFFICE”! JUNE 2023
– THE WATERSHED-SHED!**