

# CWB Draft 2025-2027 Impact Plan

## **Cowichan Watershed Board Impact Plan 2025-2027**

*Advancing Collaborative Local Governance for a Healthy Quw'utsun-Xwulqw'selu Watershed*

### **About this Plan**

The Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) renews its Impact Plan annually in collaboration with its core partners. The development of the plan is an opportunity to ensure consensus on current priorities and outline how the CWB intends to achieve progress toward whole of watershed well-being in the next 3 years.

A financial plan to support these priorities is supported by a 3-year financial forecast informed by historical, current, and anticipated funding arrangements. This includes both core annual contribution funding from our partners, and project funding through time-limited grants, contracts, and contributions.

Engagement on reviewing the priorities and activities is encouraged. Planning will begin in the third quarter of each fiscal year with the board, senior management of both partners, and the Cowichan Watershed Society.

Feedback is always welcome. Please write to [info@cowichanwatershedboard.ca](mailto:info@cowichanwatershedboard.ca).

Huy tseep q'u for your interest in collaborative local leadership for watershed health.

## 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'kwkwssthuthi'skwshuli-s. O' nilhtthu Quw'utsun mustumuhw, nilemuxutunstum 'u tthuni' snuwuntewut 'u tthushtunaaltun, tst. Uwutumtem-us 'i' ni' tstitmem't 'aanlhkwskwun-etewut, hwayumtun'as'aalstl'ulnup. Quw'utsun Mustimuhw, ha'kwushtst kw' stutul'na'mutsxetsul's kw' shtuhimstthust'ulnuptst. Mukw' stem 'o' shilukw'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*

**Mission Statement:** We come together, with one heart and mind, to work for the health of the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed and the peoples who live here.

### Principles:

1. **Nutsamat kws yaay'us tu qa':** We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed. This is an ancient Cowichan Tribes principle. Orientation in the application of the principle will be provided by the Co-Chairs. ("Nutsamat")
2. **Partnership:** The Board is built on a collaborative partnership among Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD (the partners) and seeks to engage and bridge the interests of governments, regulatory agencies, local water stakeholders and citizens.
3. **Representation:** The Board members are appointed to serve the best interests of Cowichan Basin citizens and the region as a whole in a manner that is consistent with federal and provincial interests that support sound watershed management. Members selected are, to the greatest extent possible, local community leaders and/or known water management champions-related experts.
4. **Watershed Emphasis:** The CWB's priorities and activities are guided by a vision for the watershed as a whole that is based on ecological sustainability and "whole of watershed" thinking.
5. **Transparency:** To the greatest extent possible, the actions and decisions of the CWB will be transparent and open.

**Targets:**

<p><b>Fish</b></p>	<p>We want healthy, wild, and diverse fish populations in the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed.</p> <p>[Revisions Pending: Indigenous Target under development in consultation with Cowichan Tribes.]</p>
<p><b>Flows</b></p>	<p>Seasonal flows throughout the Cowichan-Koksilah watersheds support the needs of communities and aquatic ecosystems.</p>
<p><b>Riparian</b></p>	<p>We want to protect and restore fully functioning streamside, lakefront, wetland, and estuary habitats.</p>
<p><b>Estuarine</b></p>	<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. 2023]</p>
<p><b>Water Quality</b></p>	<p>We want fish friendly, swimmable, and drinkable water in our watersheds.</p> <p>[Last updated 2023- 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>
<p><b>Watershed Connections</b></p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Water Conservation</b></p>	<p>We want Cowichan watershed residents to use water wisely.</p>
<p><b>OTHER/GAPS</b></p>	<p>In 2025, we will begin a process to define additional Targets, or expand the scope of existing Targets, so that in combination, and over the long-term, reaching these aspirational Targets would restore Whole of Watershed Well-Being. See Priority Projects.</p>

## Our Current Priorities

### 1. Develop a Whole of Watershed Approach for the Quw'utsun-Xwulqw'selu Watershed

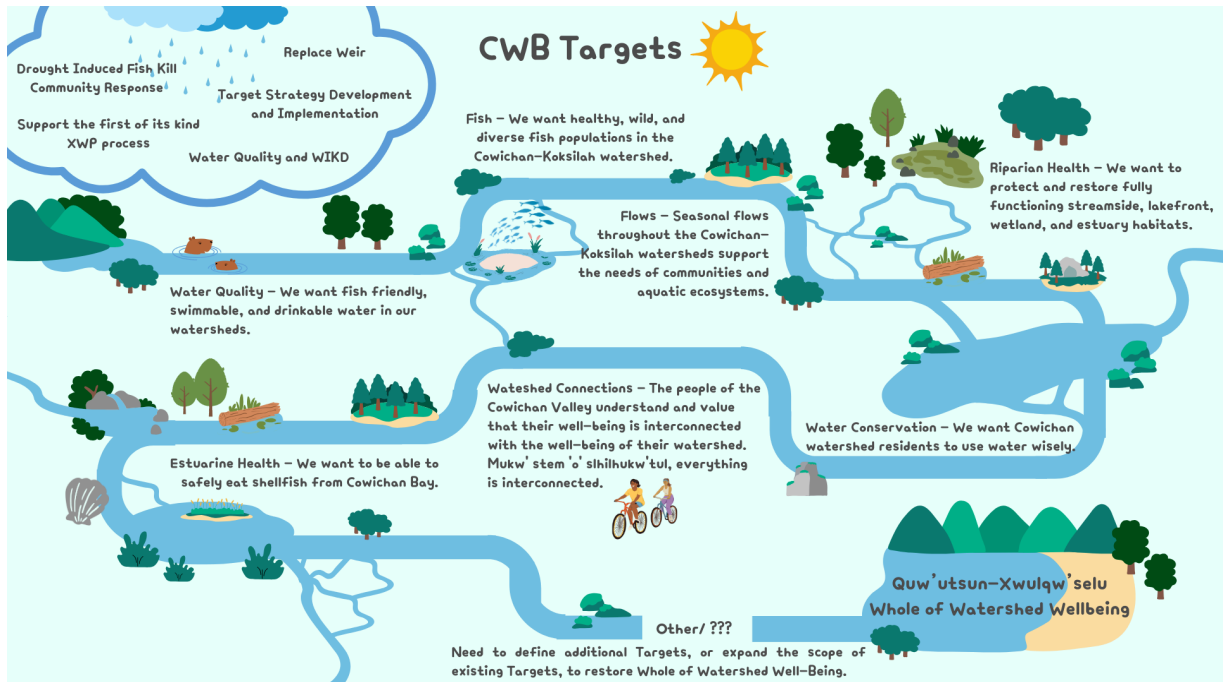
Since the Watershed Board's inception, one of our Principles has been to advocate for 'whole of watershed' thinking, and our Targets have provided a way to start down that path. However during the recent Targets Review process (2021-2024), informed by our Working Group partners, it became clear that it's time for the next step.

Actions for 2025/27:

Over the next few years, with the guidance of CWB members, partners and Target Working Group organizations, we intend to apply all that we have learned in our first 15 years in service of honouring our Principle. We will develop a Whole of Watershed action strategy (better name to follow!) that builds on the existing Targets, fills gaps, and integrates today's CWB collaborative governance model to truly lead to whole of watershed well-being. We intend for this guiding document to be made locally by and for the people who live in the watershed. It will be informed by:

- a) A State of the Watershed type of report, rooted in pre-colonial ecological function and form and informed by place-based knowledge. The goal of this report will be refined after input from the Board and partners, but at minimum we expect it will gather and analyse all the best information and knowledge about the watershed, identify gaps/what we need to understand better, and identify the limiting factors to watershed health that the CWB should be focusing on now. (Approx. 18-24 months, funding permitting.)
- b) A new Targets Strategy that responds to the above. This will be a gradual transition so that we keep working towards the 7 existing Targets while we develop the new framework. Read about the beginnings of this re-imagining here: <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Targets-Strategy-Presentation-CWB-Meeting-Nov-2024.pdf>
- c) A Working Group model to reflect what works best today: Acknowledging the significant growth in watershed-wide projects and activity, and new ways that technical capacity is organized, we will explore how to evolve. The beginnings of this are also explored in the link above.

This is a community-focused long-term goal that will be embedded with Indigenous knowledge, and perspective and, through the work of the CWB, will have Indigenous and non-Indigenous local leadership and guidance



## 2. Lead and/or Support Essential Projects for Watershed Well-Being

**Our watershed is experiencing multiple crises challenging the life-giving sustainability of our home.** The CWB is deeply embedded in key projects that will improve the health of the Quw'utsun-Xwulqw'selu Watershed. Those projects will continue and inform the whole of watershed approach. These include:

- a. **Replace the Weir.** <https://cowichanlakeweir.ca/>
  - i. Roles: Secretariat to Government to Government (G2G) and Technical Working Group (TWG) processes; contract management and administration support to Cowichan Tribes; government relations, tackling permitting issues; communications & engagement planning and delivery.
  - ii. 2025 Outcomes: Support the submission of a license application and a joint works agreement that supports a truly collaborative decision-making process, respecting Cowichan Tribes' rights; explore opportunities for additional funding; engage in ongoing operations to mitigate anticipated droughts with too little water in the interim, and support all parties as needed.
  - iii. 2026/7 Roles/Outcomes: once the applicant is confirmed and internal capacity obtained, the CWB coordinating roles will be lesser and/or completed.
- b. **Support the first-of-its kind Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning (XWP) process.** <https://www.koksilahwater.ca/>
  - i. Roles: act as advisors, support event/meeting coordination, workstreams as requested; budget/admin to Cowichan Tribes.

- ii. 2025 Outcomes: progress towards completion of a legally enforceable Water Sustainability Plan (WSP) under the Water Sustainability Act, for Xwulqw'selu watershed, resulting in increased water security and ecological health.
- iii. 2026/7 Roles/Outcomes: CWB staff will continue to engage as the project needs and will take guidance from the Planning Team made up of representatives from Cowichan Tribes and BC both government partners and their Joint Executive Director.

**c. Community Fish Protection Project for times of drought.**

<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/drought-response/>

- i. Roles: continued coordination of collaborative monitoring and response plan; communications and outreach
- ii. Outcomes: process report that documents accomplishments, lessons learned and transferable elements of Cowichan approach; building off success for 2024 a less intensive, more directed, monitoring and response plan will be implemented until the Weir is built.
- iii. 2026/7 Roles/Outcomes: will continue to look similar to 2025 up until the Weir is replaced.

**d. Conclude our initial phase of the Water Quality and Watershed Information, Knowledge and Data Project.**

- i. Data is a key element needed to inform a whole of watershed approach and the State of the Watershed Report/Assessment (see above). We are aware that many partners are struggling with how to store, share and access watershed information. The CWB is working to find solutions to data sharing. The CWB has made a decision that as a non-profit governance entity, we are not the right entity to host and manage data, or a data hub, for the long term but we can play an effective bridging role in making existing publicly available data more accessible and prioritized for all our partners. As such, we will be furthering the work we started last year, shown here:  
<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/document/water-quality-monitoring-location-in-the-cowichan-and-koksilah-watersheds/>
- ii. 2025 outcomes will include a map-based resource and a bibliography to make watershed information, knowledge and data more meaningfully accessible to our partners and the wider community.

## **B. Putting Principles into Action: Our Ways of Working**

As important as what we do, is how we do it. **Prioritizing our principles in how we work** has been the key to CWB success and longevity. We embrace the honour of building a respectful and effective local governance model for the Quw'utsun-Xwulqw'selu watershed and beyond.

Key elements of how we action our work now and into the future, include:

1. Supporting [CWB members](#) to continually learn, understand, and act in support of the priorities and principles of the Board.
  - a. Provide space for knowledge holders and experts and community to share with the Board throughout the year on key topics/priorities.
  - b. Dedicate time at every meeting for Quw'utsun Board Members to share their history, culture and perspectives through an ongoing exploration of Hul'q'umi'num' words and phrases.
  - c. Learning on the land through field trips (e.g. weir (2024), Shaw Creek, Xwulqw'selu Ancient Forest, etc.)
  - d. Ensure a supportive wellness and a restorative culture for both the environment and ourselves – including connection with each other, with nature, and with language and stories.
  - e. Each leader takes the knowledge gained, and consensus decisions made, at the Board and utilizes their home institution's authority to create real and meaningful change.
  - f. Staff to engage specific board members in advance of and at each board meeting in their areas of expertise and interest.
2. CWB staff to continue strong collaboration with the staff teams of our core partners:
  - a. Continue to work on shared projects (e.g. Weir , XWP, CVRD's Syuth tu tumuhw (Stories from the land): Indigenous Voices in Civil Projects video series - pending funding, and anticipated whole of watershed processes.
  - b. Bring staff from both partners (and other Board and community partners) together when appropriate to share knowledge and capacity.
  - c. Consult staff from founding organizations on Impact Plans/Projects and look for areas of collaboration.
3. Support, and be supported by, the wider stewardship community who are working toward the Targets in their own way.
  - a. Attend and support the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (regularly) and other organizations as requested/needed.
  - b. Where possible, directly support, fund, or partner with watershed organizations undertaking projects that advance progress toward CWB targets and which are inline with current priorities.
  - c. When able and appropriate, provide network connections, letters of support, and/or other ways of supporting the stewardship community/partners.

4. Expand our work with partners beyond the Quw'utsun watershed to tackle shared problems and develop shared solutions.
  - a. As opportunities and resources allow, work collaboratively with neighbouring First Nations, watershed authorities, and communities to tackle shared problems and develop shared solutions. ( e.g. Private forest land practices and access, watershed data sharing, coastal salmon habitats/policy, BC Watershed Security Fund/Strategy)
  - b. Share the story of the CWB including: building blocks, challenges, successes, current work, etc., as capacity allows, when requested by other communities interested in local Indigenous collaborative governance.
5. Embrace youth mentorship and learning from Elders to build multi-generational strength.
  - a. Seek the attendance and guidance of Elders in all events (e.g T'uwahwiye Williams provides a welcome for all Speaker Series events); research options for more formal Elder guidance.
  - b. Seek the advice of Elder(s) for Hul'q'umi'num' ways of expressing Targets.
  - c. If invited/welcomed, attend Elders' lunches.
  - d. Mentor youth to build our team (board and staff); reach out to University programs with relevance to our work and/or specific projects.
  - e. Identify roles in which to hire youth to mentor under current project leads.
6. Build community knowledge and connection.
  - a. Speakers Series (in collaboration with VIU Cowichan)
  - b. Annual events (i.e. Host Lower Cowichan River Clean Up, support Celebrating Water Festival, Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul, Cowichan Tribes Open House)
  - c. Other events to support projects and partners, as capacity allows (i.e. World Water Day, Xpey' planting days, etc.)
  - d. Revamp website, logo, branding
7. Maintain the mechanisms for strong collaborative governance and lasting respectful relations.
  - a. CWB meets monthly, open to a public gallery, with agenda circulated broadly by newsletter and website.
  - b. CoChairs meet quarterly or as needed to guide CWB agendas, planning, and issues or opportunities that arise.
  - c. Cowichan Watershed Society meets quarterly, or as needed, to ensure fiscal and operational health of the organization. See Financial Plan below.
  - d. Our **15th anniversary** provides an opportunity to celebrate, learn, deepen relationships, and continue our long-term planning for the future. We hope to work with partners to collaboratively develop a whole of watershed plan. See more below.



## **Financial Plan**

The financial administration for the CWB is provided by the Cowichan Watershed Society (Society), a registered BC non-profit society (#S0061620). The Society holds a Core Operating Budget and multiple short-term Project Budgets.

Over the past year, we have increased our total annual budget through grants to allow us to better support organizational resilience and increase staff capacity. Over the next three years we will continue to slowly but steadily increase our operations budgets to allow for consistency, security and to address cost of living increases.

### **Core Operating Budget**

The core operating budget is based on several sources:

1. Annual core funding from the CWB's founding partners, Cowichan Tribes, and Cowichan Valley Regional District. These funds are critical to sustaining the Cowichan Watershed Board. Annual costs include core staffing, meeting expenses, book-keeping support, community engagement and partner communications, insurance, etc.
2. Smaller grants that contribute to our annual events (ie. River Clean Up) are also included in our core funding budget.
3. The operating budget also includes revenue generated through grant admin-fees from project grants and contracts (10-15%) to support increased administration related to projects and initiatives.
4. The Society maintains a contingency savings fund to account for cash flow shortfalls between grants or contribution payments.

### **Project Budgets**

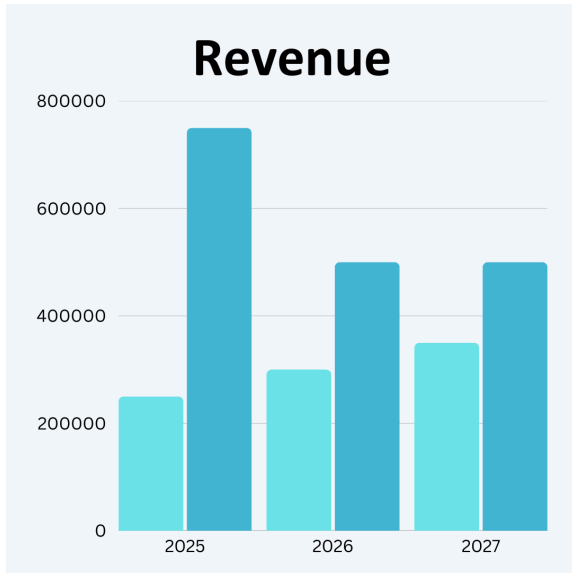
The Society supports the CWB priorities by obtaining Project Grants and Project Contracts to advance specific objectives as outlined in the Impact Plan. Project budgets are typically 1–3 year budgets, which change annually to reflect priorities at that time.

Current Project Grants supporting the work of the CWB include:

1. the third year in a three-year grant from the Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC) to support the Shift to Indigenous Co-Governance;
2. Watershed Security Fund Grant to continue the work of collaborative watershed governance;
3. BC Ministry of Environment (MOE) to support Water Quality Attainment in the Cowichan and Koksilah Watershed;
4. Pacific Salmon Foundation to support the "Fish-Kill" Workshop Series and resulting community action plan as referenced above.

Project Contracts are also included here and are the services provided by the Society under contract to another organization. Currently, Cowichan Tribes has contracted the Society to provide significant administrative, advisory and communications for the Xwulqw’selu Watershed Planning process and act as Secretariat for the Technical Working Group and Government to Government Table as well as lead Communications for the Rebuilding the Weir: A Cowichan River Resiliency Project.

**Appendix A - Budget Projection “Snapshot” for 2025-2027**



As the graph indicates, our financial plan is to increase our core strength slowly and steadily! The CWB continues to provide valuable collaborative governance support to Cowichan Tribes, the Region and our senior government partners, beyond project-funded work. It is essential that we identify additional core funding partners to sustain that. Project-funding, from grants, will evolve as we complete some projects and take on others, in pursuit of our long-term Targets. Two major projects are anticipated to be successfully concluded over the coming years: the Rebuilding the Weir: A Cowichan River Resiliency Project and the Xwulqw’selu Watershed Planning process.

## Appendix B: Who are We? (Click the image to learn more.)

### Cowichan Watershed Board Members



Chief Cindy Daniels  
– Co-Chair



Kate Segall – Co-Chair



Dr. Shannon Waters



David Slade



Calvin Swustus Sr



Christopher  
Alphonse



Alison Nicholson



Mayor Michelle  
Staples



Tim Kulchyski



The Honourable  
David Anderson



Dr. David Froese



Kristine Sandhu



Photo  
Unavailable

Jenna Sutherst



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Arlette Malcolm

### Staff Team



Danielle (Danni) Paydli, Executive Director



Tom Rutherford, Strategic Priorities  
Director



Heather Pritchard, Targets Director



Jill Thompson, Communications Director

### Target Teams

The CWB is built on collaboration. We know that very little can succeed in the long run without it. We are grateful to so many who go that extra mile with us, putting the health of the watershed first, knowing that when we protect the watershed, the watershed protects us. Nutsamat kws yaay'us tth qa': We come together as a whole to work together to be stronger as partners for the watershed.

While our Working Group model is in flux, as described above (p4), we wanted to acknowledge with gratitude the following organizations that are actively working towards the 7 identified Targets – our Targets Teams!

[To do - name the organizations working on each target, with links]