

# TOP 10 OF 2024!

Moments to Remember from the  
Cowichan Watershed Board





# 1. COLLABORATIVE WATERSHED GOVERNANCE PERSONIFIED

At the Cowichan Watershed Board, we're often asked, "How do you do it?" The answer isn't simple, and any success we've had is thanks to the incredible people who have served as CWB members over the past 14 years. However, one key ingredient is the simple yet powerful act of coming together regularly—with respect, good food, and a touch of fun! Here's a snapshot from a River Tour we hosted last July, featuring CWB members, staff, and elected representatives from our core partners, Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District. *Photo by Graham Twomey.*



Chief Cindy Daniels  
– Co-Chair



David Slade



Kate Segall – Co-Chair



Calvin Swustus Sr



Christopher Alphonse



Alison Nicholson



Mayor Michelle Staples



Tim Kulchyski



The Honourable David Anderson



Dr. David Froese



Dr. Shannon Waters



Kristine Sandhu



Arlette Malcolm



Jenna Sutherst

## 2. MEET THE COWICHAN WATERSHED BOARD

In 2024, we welcomed several new members. We deeply value the perspectives, knowledge, and collaboration that all our Board members bring to the table. *Nutsamat kws yaay'us tu qa'*: We come together as a whole to work together, strengthening our partnership for the watershed.

This year, we are particularly pleased to welcome a representative from the Province of BC for the first time. This milestone reflects both the trust the CWB has earned as a partner in watershed stewardship and the Province's growing focus on water, highlighted by the establishment of the new BC Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship.

### 3. WEIR CARING FOR THE WATERSHED!



2024 marked significant progress toward rebuilding the weir at Lake Cowichan. This new weir will help maintain strong flows in the Cowichan River, which is crucial for everyone and everything the River sustains. It is a key component of the broader Cowichan River Resiliency Project, led by Cowichan Tribes.

Much of the work is still happening behind the scenes to prepare the project, which makes a photo like this all the more exciting to share! Key milestones this year included: a major funding announcement and commitment from the Premier, seen here at Lake Cowichan on World Water Day (March 22), the Technical Working Group, a collaborative team addressing challenges and unknowns, with senior staff from Cowichan Tribes, the CVRD, the Province, and Domtar/Catalyst Crofton, coordinated by the CWB, a parallel Government-to-Government table tackling legal and jurisdictional questions as they arise; and fundraising efforts to address inflationary costs.

Rebuilding the weir has been the CWB's top priority for nearly a decade and represents the efforts of hundreds of people working toward this goal for much longer. *Photo courtesy of Cowichan Tribes.*

**This work supports our Flows Target:** ensuring seasonal flows throughout the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed meet the needs of communities and aquatic ecosystems.



## 4. COMMUNITY ADVISORS FOR THE XWULQW'SELU WATERSHED PLANNING PROCESS

This was a great day! We extend our gratitude to the facilitation team of the Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Project and the roughly 30 dedicated volunteers serving as Advisors. These individuals are part of either the Collaborative Community Advisory Table or the Cowichan Guidance Group. The two groups gathered at Bright Angel Park to share ideas, listen, learn, and envision a better future together. *Photo by Sandra Thomson.*

**This important work supports our Flows Target:** ensuring seasonal flows throughout the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed meet the needs of communities and aquatic ecosystems.

## 5. SALMON (AND PEOPLE) IN THE UPPER KOKSIAH WATERSHED

We've long known that salmon have, and likely still do, live and spawn in the upper Koksilah River and its tributaries above the fish ladder at Marble Falls. However, they are rarely observed or documented due to limited resources. That's why this photo brought us so much joy! Huy tseep q'u to the University of Victoria's Xwulqw'selu Connections Project for getting people out into the field, observing how this watershed functions (or aspires to!) so we can make informed decisions for its future health. *Photo by Kristina Disney, Xwulqw'selu Connections, UVic.*

**This effort aligns with our Watershed Connections Target:** fostering an understanding and appreciation among Cowichan Valley residents that their well-being is deeply interconnected with the health of their watershed. Mukw' stem 'o' slhilhukw'tul: everything is interconnected.



## 6. ESTUARY AND NATIVE FOODS RESTORATION

Recognizing the vital role estuaries play in watershed and aquatic health, as well as their connection to local food systems, we're thrilled to see this project taking shape. A portion of land that has served as valued farmland for many years—but is crucial for sustainable estuarine function—is being repurposed for Indigenous agriculture.

For generations, the Quw'utsun Peoples cultivated, gathered, and fished in the estuary, but access has been limited for the past century. This project aims to restore access to salmon and other native foods—the original local foods of this area—supporting a future that honors both cultural traditions and ecological balance. *Photo from the Young Agrarians website.*

*Learn more here: [Young Agrarians Recap – Quw'utsun Estuary Field Day](#).*

**This work aligns with our Estuary Health Target:** to ensure that shellfish from Cowichan Bay can be safely harvested and enjoyed. “When the tide is out, the table is set.”



## 7. COMMEMORATION OF 84,000 FISH AT QUW'UTSUN STA'LO' SKWEYUL EVENT

This photo captures the culmination of an extraordinary gift to the watershed and the community, led by two compassionate and dedicated local women. Following a devastating water quality crisis in 2023 that resulted in the death of an estimated 84,000 juvenile steelhead trout, along with countless other species over a 10 km stretch of the Cowichan River, they launched a community art project to help people understand and process this profound loss. In an incredible show of solidarity, 1,400 community members came together to honor each of the 84,000 fish. *Photo taken by Barry Hetschko at Cowichan River Day.*

Learn more here: [UVic Xwulqw'selu Connections – 84,000](#).

**This work aligns with our Fish Target:** fostering healthy, wild, and diverse fish populations in the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed.





# 8. PREVENTING ANOTHER FISH KILL: LOCAL WATERSHED GOVERNANCE PAYS OFF

With the financial support of the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and an incredible level of collaboration, we were able to avoid another fish kill in the Cowichan River this summer. Beginning March 2024, the Cowichan community collectively came together with Provincial and Federal specialists to develop a robust monitoring plan. According to expert Dr. Ken Ashley, the Cowichan River was the best monitored river in BC this summer. After the second workshop on response strategy, we had weekly communication with all major decision-makers in the watershed for quick response to the monitoring results — pulling the needed levers to keep the water as healthy and fish-friendly as possible. We finished the year with a workshop that allowed us to debrief, reflect and plan for 2025. Keep your eyes open for a CWB Guidebook that can help other communities in crisis.

**This aligns with our Water Quality Target.** We want healthy, wild, and diverse fish populations in the Cowichan-Koksilah watershed.



## 9. RIPARIAN RESTORATION AND XPEY'

Food, shelter and water are considered the basic needs of life; and for everything that lives in the river, those first two needs point to healthy riparian habitats. We move into 2025 with a deeper partnership with Quw'utsun' Cultural Connections Society and their Xpey' (Cedar) project. This project is taking actions to mitigate the loss of Xpey' (Cedar), a cultural keystone species, that is threatened by climate change and land development. In addition, we are launching an exciting pilot project on Kelvin Creek where we will complete a GIS map to identify and prioritize areas for restoration.



# 10. WE CAN DO THIS! WISE WATER USE ENCOURAGED THROUGHOUT THE XWULQW'SELU WATERSHED

As part of the Watershed Board's involvement in the Koksilah Low Flow Working Group, and with the help of a network of residents, we created and distributed these signs when the Koksilah flows dropped low this summer. Unfortunately, most of the signs disappeared within a few weeks, signalling that we have more work to do to create a culture of conservation, where everyone does their part. Forward and up! *Photo by CWB.*

**This aligns with our Wise Water Use Target.** We want Cowichan watershed residents to use water wisely.





# WHY FISH NEED PEOPLE

## 11. WHY FISH NEED PEOPLE

One more! This is a little video we made this year to shine a spotlight on some of the many people who are acting on the teaching that “when we look after the watershed, the watershed looks after us.” Enjoy! Huy tseep q’u to everyone who helped in this video, and in so many other ways that aren’t shown. [Watch the video.](#)

# Ok that was actually a Top 11, because...

“What we do, when we need that extra  
push over the cliff... we go to 11.”

(Source: Spinal Tap, 1984 comedy)



VOLUME I

VOLUME II

6

1 6

8

8

10

0

10

11

**THE NUMBERS ALL GO TO 11.**