

Koksilah Community Info Night

Hosted by: Koksilah Low Flow Working Group

Date: May 5, 2025

Virtual Meeting Summary

*The welcome, introductions, and presentations were recorded and are **available until June 15th** at this link starting at 17 minutes 30 seconds.*

[https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/GFt0jLK9jkqqa2Y2v_KzwrVqWkxmyi3JW - 7unK1a91sAU38eVDbRMG4BAko-Qg.dHD0helrEBFhw6hE](https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/GFt0jLK9jkqqa2Y2v_KzwrVqWkxmyi3JW-7unK1a91sAU38eVDbRMG4BAko-Qg.dHD0helrEBFhw6hE)

Facilitators:

Alison Nicholson (Cowichan Watershed Board, CVRD Area Director, Koksilah Working Group)
Cali Melnechenko (Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, Water Resource Manager for West Coast Region)

Presenters:

- **Larry George** (Lulumexun Lands and Governance Manager, Cowichan Tribes First Nation, Xwulqw'selu Watershed Project Government to Government Representative.)
- **Jon Jeffrey**, Ministry of Environment and Parks, Provincial Hydrometric Program.
- **Galen McMenamin**, Senior Environmental Analyst, Cowichan Valley Regional District
- **Natasha Overduin** (Xwulqw'selu Watershed Project, Joint Executive Director for the Government to Government partners)
- **Foster Richardson**, Agriculture Water resource Consultant,
- **Stacey Sowa**, Regional Drinking Water Coordinator, Island Heath.

Host

- **Koksilah Low Flows Working Group** (KLFWG) hosts this annual virtual community update.
- The KLFWG is a group of government, forestry, agricultural and resident representatives committed to coordinating, learning together and sharing information with the community on the various initiatives underway to address the low flows issue in the Koksilah and ensure the sustainability of the Watershed.

Welcome

- Larry George offered words of welcome and a quick Hul'q'umi'num lesson on the pronunciation of Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah). (See below for a link to an audio file if you would like to practice!)

Introductions

Cali and Alison introduced the format of the meeting, the history and purpose of these community information sessions (i.e., to update the community on work underway to address the serious low flow issues in the watershed), and the guest speakers (listed above).

of Attendees:

There were 66 people who registered through event website and we estimated that 50 participants, including presenters, joined by zoom (understanding some duplication; some multi-person connections).

Presentations

1. **How are flows actually measured?** Jon Jeffrey, Ministry of Environment and Parks, Provincial Hydrometric Program. <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Jeffrey-May-5-slides.pdf>
2. **What are farmers doing this year in the Watershed?** Foster Richardson, Agriculture Consultant with Ministry of Agriculture.

Foster has been contracted to assist farmers build farm resilience focusing on improved water conservation. This is the fourth year a group of farmers are voluntarily moving to 4 days on - 4 days off irrigation schedule to reduce water extraction during the driest part of the summer in an effort to minimize the chances of a fish protection order being required. In addition, several farmers are taking part in a soil moisture study to better understand how to improve soil moisture management.
3. **Overview and Update of the Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Process** - Larry George and Natasha Overduin (Xwulqw'selu Watershed Project - Cowichan Tribes, and Compass Resource Management). <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/McMenamin-Sowa-May-5-slides.pptx>
4. **How well do you know your well? – Groundwater and well health.** Galen McMenamin – Senior Environmental Analyst, CVRD and Stacey Sowa, Regional Drinking Water Coordinator, Island Health. <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/George-Overduin-May-5-slides.pdf>

Questions and Answers (note that resources referenced are on the following page)

- Q: *Is there a similar study [water sustainability plan] being done on the Nanaimo River as it applies to farmers in the southern end of the Regional District of Nanaimo/northern end of CVRD? Asking on behalf of Nanaimo Cedar Farmer's Institute.*
- A: If there are farmers that have concerns about that area, those conversations could be arranged and please contact Foster Richardson. (Foster's contact information is below.); the Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Process is the first planning process to be initiated in the Province under the Water Sustainability Act.
- Q: *Just wondering if there has been a discussion on the logging that Mosaic wants to do off Mines Rd and Spur 24, this is such a strategically important part of Cowichan Station watershed that feeds the two main creeks. One that in the fall on the low end has Chum Salmon spawn in it. I would like to say that I am all for logging, but in the watershed where there are lakes, stream, swamps and marshes there should be more commercial thinning and selective*

logging around these areas vs decimating a whole area. This logging is planned to happen in the next 3 to 5 months

A: Mosaic is talking directly with residents about it, and is not present to answer the question tonight. To contact Mosaic please email Pam.Jorgenson@mosaicforests.com

Q: *I'm curious how key protection areas have been identified (what criteria). Are there any cold-water refuges in the Koksilah? I would like to see protections for cold-water refuges in the future if so.*

A: We know groundwater creates cold water refuges and these are present in the Koksilah. (see links and resources below)

Cold water refugia are the kind of measures that the Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Process is interested in gathering more information about as part; there may be an opportunity to work with research students at the University of Victoria who may have some data about this topic.

Q: *Please describe some of the ideas and solutions for water use reduction in the Whole of Watershed Approach?*

A: In the Koksilah watershed the approach to date for managing water during times of scarcity has been TPOs [Temporary Protection Orders]. This is a reactive response focused on water extraction when flows become critically low. The hope is that the planning process helps develop more certainty and proactive approaches regarding water management. Part of the solution will be having a better understanding of the regulatory toolkit and measures under the [BC Water Sustainability Act](#). The feedback we have from community is that we need to look equally at voluntary measures and how to support those. For example, to supplement irrigation scheduling, can there be additional support for on farm water storage, water conservation for industry and households, and such? A goal for the water use reduction part of the planning process is figuring out how everyone can contribute (households, lawn watering, etc.) to disperse the burden and not just put it on agriculture.

Q: *What is known about the effects of forestry practices on watershed health and base flows? Will the watershed plan examine those effects and propose measures to address them?*

A: The planning process has a land use work stream that has gathered the hydrological questions that will be addressed in a watershed assessment. The assessment will provide information specifically about the effects of land use practices including forestry on watershed flows. There is a wide range of understanding about the issues; clarity on what is known and not known is needed to inform decisions on what the measures can be.

Q: *Can we invite the Water Makers and Water Keepers from the Tribes to give us their top priorities to ensure everyone has clean drinking water consistently?*

A: Hearing from the Cowichan Tribes guidance group is an important part of the planning process. If there is an interest in meeting other groups and individuals who may provide additional valuable information, there is a willingness to have those meetings and discussions. It would take some additional planning and coordination to have the right people participate and be available as well as specific goals to look at, discuss and refine. If there is a real willingness, they [Cowichan Guidance Group] will make it happen.

Q: *Will there be a continuation of the volunteer stream measurement program extending the previous UVIC work?*

A: UVic's Xwulqw'selu Connections program (that citizens participated in to measure temperature and conductivity in the tributaries throughout the watershed is finished. Kristina Disney is currently analyzing all the data that was collected and her results should inform any future work that is undertaken. There is a good chance that continuing some type of monitoring program would be valuable. It would need to be a community led initiative and should be planned and organized to address questions that participate, depending on the questions that need to be answered.

There may also be a need and opportunity to develop a "volunteer your well for monitoring" program to better understand the health of the aquifers. There is interest from the CVRD to establish a volunteer well network. When this will happen is the bigger question; SLR consulting is helping CVRD develop a groundwater monitoring strategy to broaden the network and monitor more quickly, with the idea of getting networks established, again: the question is when. The Regional District of Nanaimo has a volunteer network of wells established in tandem with the provincial network (potentially 18 volunteer wells?) and CVRD is looking to do the same thing. There is interest now but no confirmed timeline yet. When that is worked out, the CVRD will be excited to have volunteer well monitors! Personal info would be kept private; groundwater monitoring within an aquifer to improve understanding and characterization would be the goals but well ownership details will be kept private.

Q: *Hello and thank you for this gathering. Was the hydrologist from Mosaic invited?*

A: Yes, it was an open meeting so everyone was invited. Pam from Mosaic is in the audience (but no we did not invite the Mosaic hydrologist as a presenter this year.).

Wrap-up

Thank you for attending. A summary of the meeting will be sent to registrants. Please feel free to send us any further questions and we will try and answer them.

Co-Chairs and Presenters Contacts

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Links and Resources

Hul'q'umi'num' place names (in the original language of the area)

Hwsalu-utsum (Koksilah ridge)

Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah river). Soundbite of the Hul'q'umi'num' pronunciation from Elder T'uwahwiye'

Philomena Williams. https://drive.google.com/file/d/16xdYFtEtH8_AdczRdK21pcFfsU_eNR5R/view

Cowichan Watershed Board (including description of Koksilah Low Flow Working Group)

<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/koksilah-watershed/>

Cowichan Tribes First Nation

<https://cowichantribes.com/about-cowichan-tribes>

Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning (XWP) Project

<https://www.koksilahwater.ca/>

Sign up for updates here: <https://www.koksilahwater.ca/updates>

Cowichan Valley Regional District

Climate projections. <https://www.cvrld.ca/DocumentCenter/View/81884/Climate-Projections-Report?bidId=>

Watershed Atlas. Includes aquifer mapping, well locations, Environmentally Sensitive Areas, and hazard areas. <https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/2160/Watershed-Planning>

Drought Information Portal. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/water/drought-flooding-dikes-dams/drought-information>

Water Survey of Canada (Environment Canada)

https://wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/mainmenu/real_time_data_index_e.html

Search by Station name: Koksilah

Koksilah Working Group (Cowichan Station Area Association)

<http://www.koksilahwatershed.org>

Email: koksilah@cowichanstation.org

Facebook Group (public): [Koksilah Watershed](#)

B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food – water-related funding programs

[Beneficial Management Practices \(BMP\) Program](#)

Email questions to: bmp@iafbc.ca

[Agricultural Water Infrastructure \(AWI\) Program](#)

Email questions to: awi@iafbc.ca

Xwulqw'selu Connections Program - – University of Victoria

<https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/xwulqwselu/>