



Draft Minutes - Monthly Board Meeting

Monday, June 23, 2025

Location: Hybrid meeting at 55 Station Street, Duncan, and on Zoom

Attending in Person: Co-Chair Kate Segall (Meeting Chair), Christopher Alphonse, Calvin Swustus Senior, Alison Nicholson. **Zoom Participants:** David Slade, Michelle Staples, Kristine Sandhu, Arlette Malcolm, Jenna Sutherst, Dave Froese; Oliver Brandes. **Regrets:** Shannon Waters, Chief Cindy Daniels. **Staff/Project Leaders:** Danielle Paydli, Tom Rutherford, Jill Thompson, Katia Bannister.

1. **Welcome /Prayer.** The meeting was called to order at 9am and Councillor Chris Alphonse offered an opening prayer.

2. Regular Business:

a. Agenda Review / Revisions

Agenda adopted with no changes.

b. Review May 26th, 2025 Draft Minutes

Minutes adopted with no changes.

c. Announcements and Correspondence

Staff reviewed the announcements and correspondence included in the agenda package.

- We heard back from Kwutsun Forest Services RE our input to their Community Forest Agreement. They would like us to keep in-touch re: concerns, marbled murrelet habitat and cold water refugia.
- River clean up - location yet to be confirmed. Sun Aug 24th.
- Report on response to fish kill now available on our homepage.
- Dave Depapp provided a report on our water quality containment sampling
- Information on our drought response work is available here.
<https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/drought-response/>
- CVRD Parks plan stage 1 plan available online/in agenda package
- July 18th at office, CWB office warming, 11-2pm

Other updates:

- Chair Segall met with Forests Minister Ravi Parmar to raise questions regarding practices in privately managed forest lands, and request that the Province complete their PMFL Review (2019). The Minister replied that they will be focusing on this next year, and offered to devote a staff member to this. Priorities for the Minister are jobs and long-term costs. Kate would like better information about these stats in the Cowichan watershed, including the downstream costs of forestry.

Action: CWB staff to try to research numbers involved in the Cowichan watershed. E.g. job benefits vs cost of ecological services.

Action: Kate to follow-up with the Minister RE assigned staff member.

Discussion

- Q: What's the mill's plan for drought conditions?
 - A: Tom shared that Domtar has contracted Kerr Wood Liedel to model how long water storage lasts if flow is reduced below 7cms. It is important to keep flow at 7cms throughout July for water quality. Domtar will share information with Cowichan Tribes and other partners.

Chair Segall also explained that this is a new meeting style/agenda without a dedicated Public Input time, but community input is important and a part of CWB mandate.

3. Hul'q'umi'num' Watershed Lesson

Hul'q'umi'num' knowledge holder, Chris Alphonse introduced these phrases:

'uy' netulh, stl'ul'iquh – Good morning students

'i tseep 'uw' 'eli' ul'? – How are you all?

'i tseep 'uw; 'eli ul' 'u tun'a kweyul – How is everyone today?

tl'lim' nan 'uw' 'uy' netulh 'u tun'a kweyul – It's really nice today

'uy' nu shqwaluwun kwunus mukw' 'uw' lumnalu – I'm happy to see you all

mukw'tseep 'uw' le'sh tthu ha'kwushuhw – Please put away what you are wearing

le'sh tthun' shsuw'eenu – Put away your lunch bag.

'ii tseep wulh saay' kwun's yaays? – Are you ready to work?

Mukw' tseep 'w' hwts'e'nutsum – Everbody please sit down

'ii ch 'uw' yu kwun'et kwthu hakwushuhw tse'? – Do you have your supplies?

'uwe 'u te' lhwet 'l tsqwul'qwul'? – Does anyone have any news?

Ha' 'un' stl'l' kw'un's ptem' 'u kw' stem 'l' ptem'utham'sh ch – Dpes anyone have a question? If you want to ask something, ask me.

Ha' 'un' stl'l' kw'un's tul'nuhw kw'uw' stem ' 'ul' 'l' se't ch tthun' t'eluw – Raise your hand is you have a question.

Nawus ch qwal, Sam – You can speak Sam

4. Survey of Watershed Board Meeting Format - Responses

Kate presented highlights of Watershed Board responses to the survey:

- People appreciate updates on watershed work, learning, open thoughtful discussions, language learning.
- Areas for improvement included more space on agenda for open discussion, State of Watershed Reports to focus conversation, trying not to miss (cancel) any meetings so we don't fall behind, maximum three topics on agenda so there's enough time to discuss topics.
- Deep commitment to nutsum'at, coming together to co-govern and make decisions about the watershed. Committed to continuing this work and improving where we can.

5. Follow Up Time RE Drought Reporting and Planning for 2025 Season

- a. Current Update. Tom gave an overview of current conditions this summer in the Cowichan River.

Discussion

- A hydrologist indicated that current snow pack has no bearing on river flow; Tom - curious about that, will follow up.
- Questions about how/when decisions are made about whether to lower the river flow rate from the weir? Tom replied that the decision is made officially between the Province and the mill; he is pushing to remain at 7cms until August.
- Diurnal pH fluctuations dropping due to TOLC effluent management. 9 or higher is problematic.
- Q: Is the pH because of the dissolved aluminum?
 - Tom clarified that the problem is the encouragement of algae growth, which causes DO (dissolved oxygen) fluctuation, which causes a lot of stress for fish. Then the algae dies off and causes pH spikes. In 2023 this was 100 times higher in day than night. This level causes ammonium in the river to change chemically, lose an extra ion, and become ammonia, which is toxic.
 - Nutrients believed to be coming from JUB, not Somenos, are causing levels 10 to 100x higher in this part of the river. DFO and the Province are leaning into this.
 - Tom acknowledged Jenna Sutherst for coming to the weekly meetings to push good decisions for fish. Lots of eyes on this this year.
- DFO enforcement officers are out in Lake Cowichan to make sure requirements are being met. Other watersheds like Koksilah are seeking attention too, including from climate change Canada.
- Q: How much rain is needed to make a difference?
 - A: Tom replied that rain from this weekend didn't seem to make a difference, we need real rain but there's none forecasted. Watershed Board should help move infrastructure projects forward.
- Q: Great that we are focusing on water quality in Cowichan; what about the Koksilah?
 - A: Tom said that the Koksilah is better off than Cowichan because: a) no sewage outflows (2 in Cowichan) and b) Koksilah River is overall colder. Increasing WQ monitoring overall would be great, but with limited capacity focusing on Cowichan makes sense.
- Q: Does the Koksilah flow level drop as much?
 - A: Flows drop much lower in Koksilah.
 - No sewage, but lots of agriculture?
 - Early sampling in Koksilah showed high levels of e-coli but that improved. It would be good to have a couple of permanent monitoring stations with downloaded data.
 - **(Potential Action)** Kate suggested she and Alison speak with Galin at CVRD about this.
 - Some algae is noted upstream of farms, which would indicate it may be related to forestry.
 - **(Potential Action)** - request for an algae expert to talk about that with the Koksilah community, or through a speaker series. (Dave Preikshot, MNC, did a speaker night but focussed on algae in Quamichan Lake only.)

- b. Communications - Jill provided CWB's 5 Key Messages about Current Drought conditions in the Cowichan River this summer (also on our [website](#), and we did a [media release](#) about this):
1. CWB is on high alert for the possibility of another fish kill.
 2. CWB has convened very strong collaboration of partners to respond and reduce the possibility of a repeat.
 3. Action is already being taken. Monitoring is in place and informing real change, such as changes in sewage discharge, recreational fishing closures will be sooner.
 4. But all are concerned that these actions won't be enough without rain, until the weir is raised.
 5. Individuals can help. Call DFO, Environment Canada, RAPP with observations; respect sensitive fish habitat with swimming choices.
- c. Board Discussion - Province has Algae watch and there is a video on forestry practices. (?)

6. Target Strategy: Updated with Whole of Watershed Next Steps (10:05 am)

Danni presented a summary of a draft approach/framework to our Targets that staff recently workshopped to define next steps. See summary [here](#), as well as the [Target Strategy Framework & Whole of Watershed Strategy](#).

General Board Feedback / Input

Important to include important trends

Parts 1 and 2 (see summary doc) together inform 3, and then 3 informs 4. Not just overlapping pieces, a sequence, but one that is constantly revisited.

Be careful about separating out Indigenous perspectives; that's integral throughout all parts of the work. Not an input, woven into everything.

Comments on Values:

Collaborative, Shared jurisdiction, shared decision making

Relationship

i) Comments on the Indigenous perspective / origins of the watershed / original state

- staff also struggled with setting this piece apart, but felt it is needed to create a foundation, and understand the shifting baseline - e.g. what was happening in the 1800s? Need to get beyond historical data sets.
- See Phd thesis by Sarah Morales, in depth analysis and stories from Indigenous and colonial moments in the watershed, Indigenous laws
- Knowing colonial impacts that have changed the physical structure of the river is a challenge; we aren't able to recreate what the river looked like but the Indigenous laws have been constant so they offer insights into how we can return to watershed health

- Also about how colonial structures are preventing progress—not just taking things now as “how it is”.
- Danni/Arlette: Summer reading list. Action item: Send along things that are important for Board members to read:
 - Sarah Morales’ research that Oliver referenced – <https://wyaj.uwindsor.ca/index.php/wyaj/article/view/4813/4036>
 - "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Wall Kimmerer
 - Medicine Wheel for the Planet - Dr. Jennifer Grenz.
 - <https://poliswaterproject.org/polis-research-publication/working-for-watersheds-roadmap/>

ii) Comments on State of the Watershed/Taking the Pulse

- CVRD is doing comprehensive zoning bylaws right now. Will be sent out for referrals at some point so could make CWB an official referral. Members advocating for regulations around water use, reuse, rain water capture, etc for a long time now.
 - Need to think about framing the report to help make sure holes in the zoning bylaws are filled. Example of Koksilah, have the info we need to create bylaws, but no action is taken without reports.

iii) Comments on Targets and indicators:

- Targets feel technical right now, will be helpful to know more
- Don’t want to have too many targets, thinking of only adding one or two.
- Somebody at some point will have to coordinate the hubs, databases, etc., may fall onto watershed board.

iv) Comments on Target Action Plans

- Goal is to turn current activities, and gaps into activities, into narratives so that people can see themselves within the targets work, that progress is being made, and where we need to go next.
- Action stories, not just plans. Putting the targets in the story.
 - What are the priorities? Are they ranked? E.g. [guest suggestion]First priority Cowichan weir, lake Cowichan sewage, Duncan sewage? Second growth missing from this.
- We need to revisit targets because right now they won’t fully revitalize the watershed.
- Wondering about the potential for economic research? E.g. Can we know the importance of forestry to local jobs? We hear different things - this should be easy to answer.
- Private forestry is another piece in this.

- Water use - we are growing as a community in big ways. Agriculture is important. Need to understand who uses how much water
- Complications of differences between municipal governments re: water use. Big challenge.
- Value of water. There was a program called “working for watersheds” assessing the value of watersheds. Put economic processes into accessible terms. Provide a snapshot like Vancouver Island economic forum. Whatever the economics is, there is no economy without a functioning watershed, so what is a functioning watershed and how do we get there.
- There are costs associated with ongoing activities that we are not capturing, Why should we invest in restoration etc? How do we make sure that everyone has a place? Knowing the trade-offs would help us to have more intelligent conversations.

7. Annual Report Draft (11:45 am) - For Decision

Danni sought adoption of the [Draft 2024 Annual Report](#) as final. Moved by Alison, seconded by Kristine, **adopted by consensus.**

8. Other Business (11:50 am)

- Discussion about the July field trip / picnic in lieu of meeting. Options.
- Feedback on this Board meeting format?
 - Zoom worked well with the Owl (borrowed from CVRD). Can we borrow an Owl for next time?
 - **Action - staff to look into use of Owl** for Quw’utsun Cultural Connections and CWB. Also being considered by CVRD and Lake Cowichan.
- Cold water refugia - Tim and Jenna are doing more work to monitor cold water refugia, then will come to this table to figure out how to protect these. Jenna’s team is looking into habitat monitoring to make better use of the cold water inputs; trialing different methods for mapping cold water refugia to create 3D maps and link these to policies. Has implications for other watersheds. It is important to recognize the significance of these refugia for climate change.

9. Adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 11:50am.

Agenda package can be found at: <https://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/meetings/>