



Board Meeting Minutes – DRAFT

Monday, Sep 29, 2025 9am-noon

Location: Si'em Lelum Dining Hall (5574 River Rd, Duncan)

Meeting Chair: Chief Cindy Daniels

Attending: CoChair Kate Segall, Christopher Alphonse, Tim Kulchyski, Michelle Staples, Alison Nicholson, Shannon Waters, David Slade, David Froese, Kristine Sandhu, Jenna Sutherst

Regrets: Arlette Malcolm, Oliver Brandes, Calvin Swustus Senior

Staff/Project Leaders: Danielle Paydli, Heather Pritchard, Tom Rutherford, Jill Thompson, Katia Bannister

Guests: Sonia Furstenau, Alistair MacGregor. **Other Audience members:** ~6

Minutes

1. Welcome/Prayer

Chief Daniels called the meeting to order at 9am.

2. Agenda Review / Revisions

No revisions, agenda adopted.

3. Review June 23rd, 2025 Draft Minutes

No edits, June minutes adopted.

4. Announcements and Correspondence (see agenda package)

- Xwulqw'selu WSP planning process survey - everyone encouraged to fill in the Koksilah WSP survey – what does the community want to support – industry or the watershed? Need to make our voices heard on that question.
- Indigenous food gathering – still looking for volunteers
- Speaker Series resuming - Next speaker series event Oct. 20 – several organizers of indigenous food gathering; looking for an MC to coordinate the evening (Michelle Staples raised her hand)
- Jurisdiction Back conference last week; Stephanie Atleo spoke; excellent job
- Nutsamaat musical evening
- Genevieve Singleton spoke about the Quw'utsun Sta'lo Skweyul - acknowledged support from Chief, Stuart and all those supporting the event, as well as the CWB for providing all honouraria.
- OP ED in Times Colonist today by Chief Daniels about estuary restoration project
- Acknowledged excellent weekly DFO escapement reports.

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

Councillor Chris Alphonse provided a lesson in hul'q'umi'num.

6. Recognition of former MLA Sonia Furstenau and former MP Alistair MacGregor

The CoChairs acknowledged Sonia and Alistair for their hard work and unwavering support for the watershed, the weir, Koksilah Watershed Planning, and the Watershed Board model through their

former positions as Cowichan Valley Provincial and Federal government representatives. Each was presented with a Cowichan knit toque (knitter Alice Modeste). Staff shared videos of our elected friends at work for the watershed!

- Instagram reel on weir funding, and the brilliance of "upstream investing" from Sonia <https://www.instagram.com/soniafurstenu/reel/C3thn9QJhAf>
- Youtube compilation of Alistair's weir advocacy in Parliament https://youtu.be/UIUage_tltw

7. Recommitting to Whole of Watershed Well-Being through Collaborative Targets

- Jill Thompson, Collaborative Targets Lead CWB (new role!) engaged the Board members in a hands-on exercise, matching past and planned projects and work completed with our Targets. The members were encouraged to recognize that the path to each Target will be 'messy', often crossing or joining other "Target trails" as some challenges and solutions are connected to multiple elements in the watershed.
 - Reminder – targets based on CBWMP – acknowledgment of Rodger
 - 7 Targets originally developed and still supported
 - Heather's work identified gaps in current targets in order to address whole of watershed thinking
 - 4 key elements to our work:
 - Indigenous perspective
 - State of the watershed
 - Targets and indicators
 - Action plans
 - Viewing our target strategy as "trails" – sometimes meandering, sometimes more direct, faster and slower sections, occasional dead ends, paths crossing frequently – not a direct line.
- Board Member Alison Nicholson lead a follow-up discussion. Starting with sharing that the watershed is a complex system. Traditionally our "system" is structured and siloed and doesn't work. We need to improvise – we need to do something different.
- Board Discussion:
 - This was hard but a good and different way to understand our work; added upstream investments and holding industry accountable.
 - CWB needs to be nimble — we can't stick to a straight line goal. Need to improvise.
 - Need to find key leverage points where we can make a difference. We get really fixated on the weir – keep stepping back – are we missing other key leverage points – always need to keep examining our work – stepping back and look at the whole picture.
 - Weir is a band aid – we absolutely need it but we need to fix everything else as well.
 - Nothing linear about our work – everything all at once, emphasised how hard it can be to pull the strings together.
 - The activity showed us how much everything is interconnected. Like a watershed
 - XWSP – bringing things together in a pinch point – hard to bring the strands together – the clip isn't strong enough – a real metaphor. Our XWSP needs stronger clips!!!!
 - Koksilah watershed governance – need a communication plan.

- Would like to have a map or digital version to summarize this.
 - Jill will try and digitize this to report out
- Jill challenged the board members to name all the Targets; they did so successfully (if a bit of peaking!)
- Koksilah has similar challenges to Cowichan but no lake storage option so important to influence land and water use.
- It is important to take a whole of watershed approach in both watersheds (all watersheds), and we are not doing that...
- Question - Could/should target language be more inclusive (all watersheds) in the region rather than exclusive to Cowichan watershed?
- Danni proposed a more indepth workshop in January-February.

BREAK

8. Water Quality and Flow - Summer 2025

- Tom Rutherford, Strategic Priorities Director, provided a slidedeck and presentation to summarize the summer's fish/flows/water quality situation in the Cowichan River, accompanied by comments from Board Members Tim Kulchyski and Jenna Sutherst. Followed by Board discussion.

See Tom's slidedeck [here](#). Tom acknowledged two Board members, Jenna and Tim, for their excellent work on this over the summer and they will speak to the Board's role in this after.

Tom noted that he has heard that there is no other watershed where the Feds, Province, First Nation and local gov't are all working together, and he is convinced this is the only way it can work, as each brings different authority, responsibilities, knowledge, and resources to the challenge.

Some key points:

- temperatures were usually above 16, often over 20, and sometimes (lethal) 24 degrees.
- dissolved oxygen (DO) again was supersaturated at night. This causes oxygen bubbles (like a diver with benz).
 - Town of Lake Cowichan (TOLC) stopped releasing effluent at night in response
 - issues with algae gumming up equipment in lower river made WQ below JUB hard to measure; Tim found dead fish in the lower Cowichan.
- pH - above 9 all summer in the upper river. Not good.
- actions taken this summer: delayed reducing flows as long as possible, stopped fishing, TOLC sequestered effluent. pH is still high.
- long long term solutions: require major infrastructure projects... weir, TOLC plant, JUB, cold water pipe etc.

- Reflections from Tom

- This year for the first time, we are not just looking at the tradeoff of water flows as we have for decades, now there is another layer RE water quality tradeoffs.
- Pumping is awful - risk of sudden stopping of water which would be devastating. Today, we are very close to the line where pumps will be needed to keep the river flowing at 4.5; rain is happening this week, but mill is installing the pumps right now in case.

- No major fish kill this year - that is great. High engagement by all levels gov't including excellent work on cold water refugia.
 - 1700 adult Chinook are belly scraping up the river now - past the Allenby fence. More downstream. Hoping to increase flows soon to help them up.
 - Challenge - work has been funded by grants, and there is less money next year. This won't go away until the weir is raised, and other infrastructure projects. We need an interim plan.
- Reflections from Jenna Sutherst, Section Head, Salmonid Enhancement Program, Restoration Centre of Expertise - South Coast Area, Fisheries and Oceans Canada / Government of Canada
 - There were highs and lows this summer.
 - Went into summer with the lake less than 100% full; TOLC had not been proactive over the winter to empty their 3rd lagoon to create effluent storage capacity.
 - Lessons:
 - off-season prep is key. Domtar should plan for a full lake, TOLC needs to empty the 3rd lagoon and use alum injections.
 - WQ situation room was key - we avoided a mass mortality. We did have fish die but it would have been worse without that real-time decision-making. This group is necessary until the weir is rebuilt.
 - Shout out to Ken Ashley as advisor - don't know what we'd do without his pro-bono expertise.
 - Big win - TOLC discharge permit was amended by the province -previous permit allowed what happened in 2023. PH limit of 8.3 at Skutz, so sewage needs to be sequestered. This is rarely done.
 - WQ is a huge issue in the Cowichan, including terrible WQ in the lower river as well. We need to understand the lower river better, and put pressure to improve that system as well. A real-time monitoring station has been requested (funding) to complement the one at Skutz.
 - What is the CWB's role? Temperatures are lethal for fish, and beyond our control but we can work to protect cold water refugia; understand them and advocate for associated protection; advocate for cold water siphon in the weir upgrade.
 - What can DFO do? Fisheries Act - receiving environment around 'normal' conditions is changing because of climate change, erosions, turbidity, low flows. The Fisheries Act has not evolved. Is this a good standard anymore for fish habitat? Probably not Ok anymore.
 - Reflections from Tim Kulchyski, Cowichan Tribes' Lulumexun biologist, Quw'utsun community member.
 - Being able to bring everyone together in real time is a crucial role of CWB. In 2023, we don't know how many coho we lost, and we don't know the impact of this year. I liked what we saw in coho smolts at River Day - in good shape. Pretty sure there were other years like 2023 that we missed, (because we weren't looking) it's just that the dead fish were seen in 2023.
 - 70.2 trestle - WQ dynamic at its worst.
 - The lower end is a data gap. Dynamic groundwater situation; JUB outfall.
 - How do we build a process to do all we can do? It's not only in Cowichan - crises will continue, and in other places.
 - We need to get organized in December - there was a winter drought in Jan/Feb.
 - Keep long term momentum without burning everyone out.

- Tom - workshop planned in Nov/Dec (need BCGEU strike to be over). Looking for a funder for the workshop. Want swimmers as well as gauges for next year - also needs funding. Agreed that we weren't well prepared in early spring but once we got going, TOLC attended every meeting, JUB representation was lacking all season. The cost for a cold water pipe is known.

Discussion

- reflecting on whole of watershed health, it seems to be easier to talk about some things and not others. Seems to be hard to talk about Domtar's pipe and how much water is taken, and the PMFL, and tubers. I would like to be able to talk about all the issues openly.
- TOLC has spoken with Ministers about the future of the sewage lagoon. We need a plan / design. We need to be able to say we will not be discharging into the river. Need all parties to partner.
- RE the philosophy of pumping - with thousands of chinook in the river already at current flow; we're not talking about pumping for the fish, it's for the mill. Catering and caving to industry. Speed at which they reduce the flows is an issue. Frustration - we can do a better job of supporting better sewage management. Why are we tacitly supporting the use of water from our river for toilet paper production? We need to change what we can change and the mill is what we can change.
- it's 40km from the lake to the bay - the TOLC can be looking for support from all levels because it benefits everyone all down the river. Get everyone to agree on the plant at TOLC.
- listening to the input, the Board needs to think about how much advocacy work CWB should be doing vs technical work. Something to think about.

9. Next Board Meeting Agenda Items (11:37am)

- Weir Project Updates - Tom Rutherford, Strategic Priorities Director CWB
- Xwulqw'selu Watershed Sustainability Plan Updates - Danni Paydli, Executive Director CWB
- Other requests?

Danni gave a brief update on Xwulqw'selu Watershed Sustainability Plan

- o XWSP is focused on moving three key elements forward:
 - o Water use regulations
 - o Land use and restoration
 - o Water storage (on and off farm)
- o CWB is playing a role in administration support for Cowichan Tribes; engagement of the agricultural sector on water storage and encouraging community engagement.
- o Recognition that there is confidential information in both this and the weir discussion that mean we can't always bring things forward to this meeting, which is public. This is a challenge we, as staff, are navigating. We are not requesting a solution from the Board but just a recognition of this situation.
- o There is a survey out and we encourage everyone to take the survey: <https://www.koksilahwater.ca/>
- o In addition, there is and Open House on Nov 13 3-7pm Open House and advisory team meetings in early November (*NOTE**both of these engagement projects have since been cancelled due to Government strikes*).

Tom gave a brief update on the weir project, and noted that Kirk Stinchcombe will bring a presentation next month with greater detail about the water license application steps underway.

- o it was noted that it is possible to have in-camera conversations.

- o one Board member expressed frustration and opposition to some people knowing what others don't. e.g. Who is getting compensated and why?

10. Other

- o Chief shared that she will be meeting with Housing, Health, Forests, WLR Ministers soon, with 15 min with each Minister.
- o Danni proposed a workshop in Jan/Feb to spend more time on the targets.
- o liked the meeting today
- o expressed concern about big infrastructure projects, worried that we're going to be focusing on Band-Aids for more years. Don't want to lose that whole of watershed commitment.
- o Support expressed for a 2-day workshop, and more of this at each meeting.
- o Land use is important and we don't talk about it enough.

11. Meeting Adjourned by Chief Daniels at 11:54.

Images: Hands-on activity by Board members demonstrating how the path to each Target will be messy, often crossing or joining other "Target trails". Challenges and solutions may be connected to multiple elements in the watershed.

