

An aerial photograph of a wide river flowing through a mountainous landscape. The river is the central focus, with a large, forested island in the middle. The surrounding mountains are covered in dense green forest. The sky is bright with some clouds. The text "Watershed Sustainability through local stewardship" is overlaid in white serif font.

# Watershed Sustainability through local stewardship

## "Your BCWF: Fuelled by Passion, Driven by Members"

- I am Co-Chair of the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable and member since its inception 11 years ago.
- In the beginning, there was strong concern for our Cowichan chinook and the management of Cowichan river flows.
- Fuelled by passion from other BCWF members;
  - Wayne Harling, mentor both in writing and lobbying for what one believes in,
  - Bill Otway loved to advise and lead by example,
  - John Holdstock always had as a footer to his e-mails, "the world is run by people who show up."
  - Ted Brookman, our current Inland Fisheries Chair, has been a dedicated and influential member
  - Al Martin, our new BCWF Strategic Planning Director, has been a valuable advisor and participant.

The Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation funded a proposal which included a plan to:

- Engage stakeholders and partners directly in area-based conservation decision-making,
- Support the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable as a pilot project,
- Assist the Cowichan Watershed Board in supporting local management and control.



Cowichan River







# Cowichan Watershed Synopsis

Cowichan Lake is 35 km long with 6 rivers and 54 small creeks as tributaries .

Cowichan River is 52 km long, one significant falls with fishway, flowing into a broad estuary at the head of Cowichan Bay.

It is a Can-US Salmon Treaty 'Indicator' for chinook abundance

Historic chinook escapement range 7,000-10,000, coho in the 30,000-50,000, chum between 100,000 to 200,000 range.

Cowichan aquifer supplies water to 40,000 people in the Regional District and Municipality of North Cowichan.

The Cowichan River is both a Federally and Provincially designated Heritage River

Cowichan Tribes are the largest First Nations Band in B.C. living in and around approx. 6 designated reserve lands

An aerial photograph of a wide river flowing through a lush, green valley. The river is surrounded by dense forests and rolling hills. In the background, there are more mountains under a sky with soft, white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

What is a 'Stewardship Round Table'?

Watershed sustainability through local  
knowledge and shared interests.



# 11 years ago, a crisis started it all...

- A very dry summer after a dry spring resulted in low storage level in Lake Cowichan,
- Water license rules prevent storage of summer rains!,
- Water supply in the Lake not able to meet the minimum flow required for salmon & trout (7 cms),
- Cowichan chinook are at the lowest escapement in 30 years.
- The Pulp Mill and the River were going to run dry!





# The seeds of local control are planted

- Catalyst Paper chaired a 'crisis meeting' as owner of the water license.
- Ad hoc agency & community interests discuss options to support trout & chinook plus keep Catalyst Pulp Mill operating,
- Recommendations to Prov. Gov't agreed to by consensus,
- Situation created a pooled fund in support of crisis prevention which lead to a new Water Management Plan and new governance recommendation.

# Cowichan Stewardship Round Table Continues

- This ad hoc group worked so well together, and because the crisis identified key areas to develop better strategies,
- The Cowichan Round Table continued under the leadership of Catalyst Paper, DFO and the progressive Cowichan Valley Regional District.
- The depth and breadth of representation in the Table was vital,
- All levels of government including strong representation from Cowichan Tribes.



## The Cowichan Roundtable Meets Monthly







A photograph of a river with a large area of exposed ancient clay bank. The river is muddy brown, and the bank is a mix of grey and brown sediment. In the background, there is a steep, forested hillside with dense evergreen trees. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

- Habitat restoration was the top of the list for chinook recovery,

- #1 Problem was 10,000 to 30,000 cubic meters per year of suspended sediment in the lower ½ of the river from a 1 km stretch of exposed ancient clay bank!

- Money was raised from 'Living Rivers' to prepare an technical plan

- The whole Round Table membership committed to this one major project.

- Actual project funded from Living Rivers and Pacific Salmon Commission



# Success built a solid team for the future

- To date \$1.3 million raised,
- 1 Km of river rebuilt and engineered away from clay bluff, annual maintenance from sloughing area.
- 40% reduction in sedimentation,
- egg to fry survival rate increased **50%** downstream.





An aerial photograph of a river flowing through a suburban area. The river is dark and occupies the central and lower portions of the frame. On either side of the river, there are houses, trees, and some commercial buildings. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

# Why prepare a *Water Management Plan*?

*Previous water management in the Cowichan Basin consisted of an Ad Hoc Cowichan River Committee, with members from Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst Paper, Ministry of Environment, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, making in-season flow management decisions during annual drought crises.*

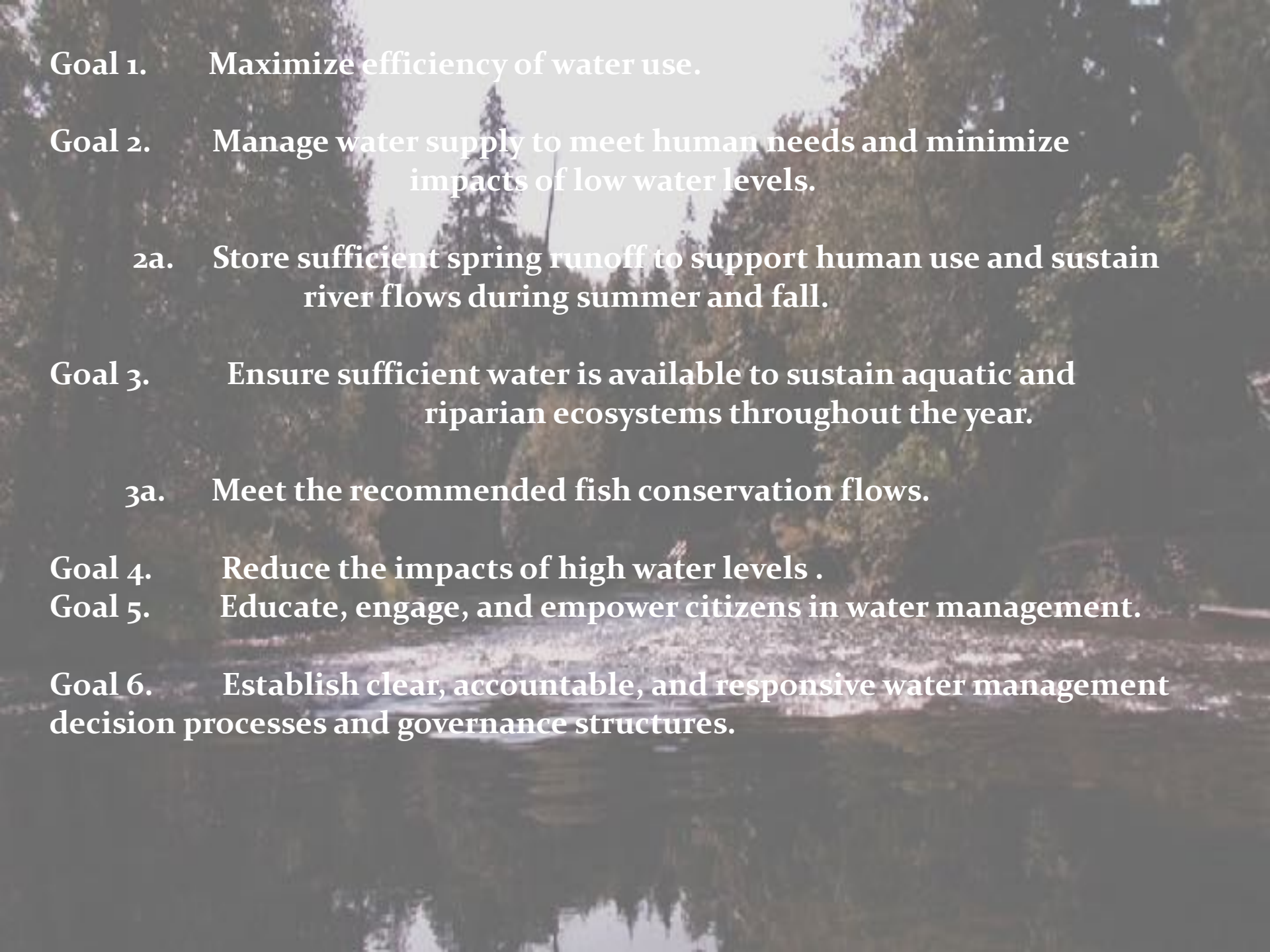
*The Committee recognized that the approach was inadequate to deal with the complex and long-term issues facing the Basin, and in 2004 they advocated the development of a Water Management Plan that would move beyond crisis decision making, prepare responses to the effects of climate change, and plan proactively for current and future water needs in the Basin.*

A Cowichan Basin Watershed Management Plan is started in 2005, completed in 2007

<http://www.cowichanwatershedboard.ca>



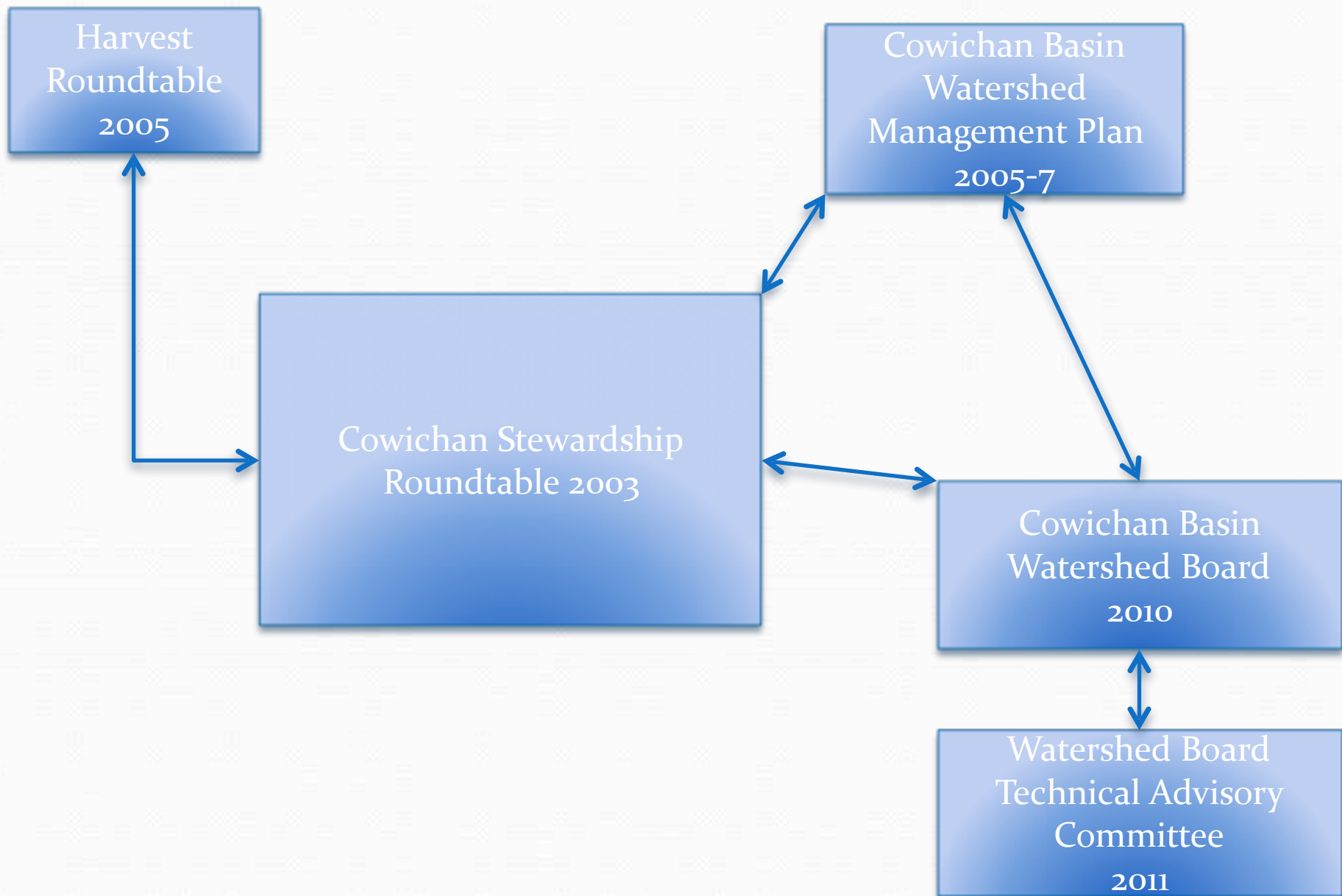


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- Goal 1. Maximize efficiency of water use.
- Goal 2. Manage water supply to meet human needs and minimize impacts of low water levels.
- 2a. Store sufficient spring runoff to support human use and sustain river flows during summer and fall.
- Goal 3. Ensure sufficient water is available to sustain aquatic and riparian ecosystems throughout the year.
- 3a. Meet the recommended fish conservation flows.
- Goal 4. Reduce the impacts of high water levels .
- Goal 5. Educate, engage, and empower citizens in water management.
- Goal 6. Establish clear, accountable, and responsive water management decision processes and governance structures.

An aerial photograph of a large, dark blue lake nestled in a valley. The lake is surrounded by dense green forests and rugged, reddish-brown mountains. In the background, more mountain ranges are visible under a clear sky. The lake's shoreline is irregular, with small islands and peninsulas. A road or path is visible on the left side of the lake.

In 2010, the Cowichan Watershed Board is created:

- 2 Co-Chairs, the Cowichan Regional District Chair and the Cowichan Tribes Chief.
- 4 Directors appointed by the co-chairs from the community.
- 2 selected Regional Board Directors,
- 1 Cowichan Tribes Councilor.
- 2 people recommended by the Province
- 2 people recommended from the Federal Government.
- An Advisory Technical Committee advises the Board on issues as they arise.
- First task is to implement the Water management Plan





# Now for the bad news!

- Despite continued discussions with Province, no significant change in spite of risk to Pulp mill and salmon due to climate change,
- Trout and salmon run in danger without new storage!
- Cowichan Valley water supplies in all forms come from the ground water aquifer, and it is showing water temperature increases on top of summer static level decrease.
- The Cowichan Stewardship Round Table supports the Cowichan Watershed Management Board,
- Hope lies in the new Provincial Water Modernization Act





**Currently:**

**Community tours educate wide array of community and government to watershed issues.**

**Provincial water controller refuses to allow early control of the Lake level before April 1.**

**6 Lake Cowichan Waterfront owners and 24 as “Intervenors” are appealing the one month extension of water storage granted last year.**

**Watershed Board with CVRD plan to apply for a water license to increase Lake storage. ( Raise the weir height at least 20 cm)**