

Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Meeting Notes

THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 2022: 9am to 12:00 pm Zoom Meeting

Welcome and acknowledgement that our co-chairs host the meeting from the unceded traditional territory of Cowichan Tribes.

Regrets: Stephanie Cottell: Cowichan Land Trust, Melissa Nottingham: DFO, Neil Anderson: Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society.

Attendees: Genevieve Singleton: Co-chair Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable (CSRT), Parker Jefferson: Co-chair Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable, Ian Morrison: Area F Director Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Rose Williams: Legislative Intern from Haida Gwaii, intern with the Green Party, Jerram Gawley: Legislative Intern from Comox Valley with the Green Party, Rick Bryan: Recreational Paddlers, Heather Pritchard, Cowichan Watershed Board, Barry Hetschko: Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society (SMWS) and Cowichan Valley Naturalists (CVNS), Cole Smith, Office of MLA Sonia Furstenau, Joe Saysell: Friends of the Cowichan, Tom Rutherford: Cowichan Watershed Board, Karen Deck: Save Our Holmes Society (SOH), Peter Woods: BC Parks, Bruce Coates: Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society (CVNS), Edmond Duggan: Paddlers, Lisa Fox, Pam Jorgenson: Mosaic Forests, Alistair MacGregor: MP.

Thanks to Tom Rutherford, CWB, Jill Thompson and others for Hosting the Zoom Meeting.

River Day Event – Sunday September 25th - Update – re Covid Reopening Grant. Will likely not know details until June or July about the grant. Genevieve is applying for other funds in case we do not get this. However, it will mean a smaller event.

Discussion – Tom - May mentioned that we may wish to prepare a response to “if we do get the grant” at such a late date.

Rick: Paddlers are “in” regardless of funding, we will lead our paddling event that day regardless at Lakeview Campsite, Lake Cowichan.

Upcoming CSRT Talks - April 21 is Bethany Coulthard of Cowichan Tribes staff speaking on Marine Projects, May 19th Cheri Ayers will speak on the BC Restoration Fund for Salmon Stocks. On June 16th, Jamieson Atkinson of BCCF will speak on Trout in the Comox Watershed. July 21st meeting will be our annual field day Stoltz Pool, Cowichan River Park picnic site. Joe suggests that Alexandra Morton be invited to come to this. If so, Joe will try to get some funds to help her travel down.

Future In Person Meetings - Discussion about potential to bring in-person meetings back to the Round Table – which were typically hosted at the Fish Health building, BC Trout Hatchery in Duncan. Ian: zoom is great for fundamentals, but not very effective for relationship building or public engagement. Local government is going towards a hybrid model where technology is added to the in-person meetings. Successful groups will have a hybrid formula of some sort. Parker – suggests potentially visit the site and use a hotspot to see if we could make it work. Potential to use a partner venue that could provide a space intermittently. Ian Morrison may be

willing to help (\$) with hardware to support this type of meeting if someone was able to lead an initiative to find the space and tech required.

Action item – Look into the possibilities, explore alternate partners who might host us, or explore purchasing the hardware so that we can set it up wherever we need to host hybrid-events.

Round the Table Updates

Tom Rutherford, CWB – Cowichan Tribes election February 28th, Lydia Hwitsum is the new chief of the Cowichan Tribes and will be the co-chair of the Cowichan Watershed Board. Tom recognized Chief “Chip” William Seymore for his dedication and service to the Watershed Board, as a mentor and as a leader to many. The CWB will be formally acknowledging his service.

BC is exploring a BC Water Security Fund, deadline for public input is March 18th. [Watershed Security Fund](#). CWB continues to explore a license holder for the Cowichan Weir. This process is going well.

The Watershed Sustainability Plan is proceeding on the Koksilah and is in the process of retaining a facilitator. Expression of interest is out, hoping to do interviews the last week of March.

Tom will be stepping down as ED of the Board at the end of this year.

Brian Houle, Manager Environment Catalyst Crofton - Good news to have the rainfall adequate to refill the lake over previous few days. Snowpack has also improved while still below 25th percentile and a low snowpack currently. There is still about 1 month of snow accumulation time left of this winter and enough time to accumulate more snowpack before warm weather settles in. Weather forecast continues to show significant rainfall in coming 7 days even with the sun shining on us this morning. Expecting to begin weir operations on April 1 as authorized by the water license. The new flow guide is a conversation tool for adjustments. Flows require regulatory approvals. Should Brian see a need to make adjustments, approvals will be sought.

Genevieve Singleton – reported for **Jacque Taylor re Cowichan Bring Back the Bluebird Project**. “We are planning to bring two pairs of WEBL in April and 3-5 families in May-June. The family that we brought over last summer was spotted in Metchosin a couple of weeks ago and the odd couple of a Western Bluebird male and Mountain Bluebird female is continuing to hang out in the Blenkinsop area. We are also busy expanding our nest box trails into the Victoria area.”

Genevieve Singleton mentioned that the Knocken Back Knotweed Committee consisting of biologists, Dave Polster, Cheri Ayers, Dave Lindsay and Genevieve will be starting back in May.

She mentioned that Dave Polster and she have been doing removal of Burweed at Bamberton Provincial Park and advises people to learn about this plant, it is also found at French Beach Provincial Park.

Nature programmes are starting up again with Genevieve, please be in touch if you wish one.

- Fishing and Hunting licence renewal reminder. Genevieve reminded us that funds from these go to Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and support a multitude of projects happening in the Valley, i.e., the Cowichan Bring Back the Bluebird Project.

Ian Morrison: CVRD – attended a Watershed Strategy 2-Day Workshop with leaders in the watershed. Covered drinking water, habitat, virtual format. One of the issues discussed was FITFIR, and there seems to be an openness to discuss licensing and reconciliation and the opportunities etc. There is a potential to discuss the fund and allocation. Committed bringing the report to conclusion by the end of the 2022.

Association of Coastal and Vancouver Island Communities – Convention April 1-3 Victoria - will include new minister of water, Josie Osborne. Having all water files under one ministry is exciting. Presenters in the afternoon “Restoring Habitat One Metre at a Time” will be speaking to Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project, undertaken under Cowichan Lake River Stewardship Society’s wing.

Little Beach – some internal challenges with developers to gift it to the CVRD, looks like it will be another year before it is gifted over and transitioned to a public community park.

Question from Bruce Coates - Question to Ian on the status of west of Wake Lake, and ephemeral wetlands (bullfrogs need water all year round, where other species require ephemeral wetlands). Ian Morrison - Answer – rezoning and designation on private property has occurred in that area. Property owners a couple years ago were attempting to be considerate of these issues as far as Ian knows. Alison Nicholson is Director for that area.

Question from Cole Smith - Question around Taylor Park near Kinsol Trestle and tour bus accommodations? Answer – couple of environmental reports are due to come in that address these issues. Ian attended the online engagement session, and we were able to get some of the facts about what is happening there on the table which is important. Ian is of an open mind on this and knows there is merit to get some of the traffic off the road – and sensitivities about impacts to habitat while respecting the developers and the other needs of the project.

Cole Smith, Office of MLA Sonia Furstenau - Legislature is on break for two weeks after a 5-week session which was mostly focussed on Covid and other health related issues. Sonja has been waiting to hear about Minister Osborne’s role, waiting on a plan for the new ministry. There is a Crown Block in Shawnigan Lake (Block 228 south of Baldy Mountain), Sonja is active there working to address community concern. The Green Caucus is going to release a Vision Document for Forestry. This document will provide guidance and information on concerns around forestry practices. Sonja has written a letter to Minister Conroy about the salmon redds and the impacts on the Upper Cowichan River. Cole attended the Southern Gulf Island Forum on Anchorages (Tanker Issue) this past week, Alistair is also engaged on this. Cole and the broader group are frustrated about the pace of Transport Canada on the file, general consensus about the need for broader engagement. Looking to engage politicians and other leaders around the coast to move action on this.

Genevieve – comment - requesting that the RT Group would like to continue to be engaged with the anchorage issue.

Joe – question - who is in charge of provincial fisheries? Answer – changing from Minister Conroy to Josey Osborne, new Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship and Minister Responsible for Fisheries starting April 1st.

Alistair MacGregor: MP – busy with public safety role since January (Convoy and Emergencies Act), just getting his feet under him. Exciting things,

Standing committee on agriculture (supply chain issues), next study is the environmental contribution and impacts of agriculture – soil health and climate change. Alistair managed to include language in this study from his Soil Conservation Bill C203 – which should result in a “Venn” diagram of watershed and agriculture.

Signed petitions asking Government of Canada to engage in a Just Transition Legislation, calling for transitioning workers to transition into green infrastructure – decarbonized economy etc.,

On the anchorage issue, it will only be settled by Federal Government (Under Transport Canada), and Alistair will be reintroducing the Bill – setting aside areas where Anchorages will be prohibited (Marine Conservation areas), Just-in-time arrival system, reducing the time that ships are waiting to enter ports. Anchorages are emblematic of a problem that starts in the prairies, if the system isn't working properly - then we are going to see symptoms of freighter backlogs. Language to include a request for a national strategy and wholistic approach to the entire supply chain. Hope to have an update in a couple months.

Karen Deck: Save Our Holmes Society Youbou – The website has a new lease on life and is active again (SaveOurHolmes.com). AGM on Sunday April 10th at Youbou Church. Updates from the last year and plans for the next year and vote for Directors. Invitation is on the [Save Our Homes Facebook Page](#).

Barry Hetschko: Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society – Time to pay attention to the birds, Nature Trust has come up with some posts for the streets around the highway. New nest boxes and repairs for old nest boxes are being installed around the area.

Bruce Coates: CVNS Naturalists - Talk coming up on April 7th by Libby Avis, study of moths. 700 species of moths, and where caterpillars fit into the food chain for birds etc., Working on getting Cairnsmore Neighbourhood project (pollinator neighbourhood), in partnership with the school and will complement the Cowichan Green Community work. Looking for demonstration plots in the Cairnsmore Neighbourhood. Opportunities coming up for cutting broom – broom bashers. Volunteers needed.

Peter Woods, BC Parks – Stoltz pool and group campsite is almost completed it was relocated because of erosion from high-river flows.

Pam Jorgenson, Mosaic Forests – Carbon Project, big coast carbon initiative, setting aside 45000 hectares for carbon over the coming years. Will set the stage, as an effective framework, for

other companies to come on board as well. Happy to have Mosaic team members come and provide more information to the group. See links below.

Joe – question – in the past visual landscapes have been preserved in forestry cut-blocks. Has there been a policy change about visual landscapes?

Pam - Crown land visual quality objectives – in place for all tenure projects in the province. Private lands are managed differently, modelling is done but it is not legislated. Mosaic typically engages internally to come up with plans and modelling.

Joe – question – does Mosaic consider wildlife crossing and the impacts of logging on wildlife corridors? Are there any harvest policies that address this on Private Land? Maybe in the future, Mosaic should study and model impacts the wildlife corridors.

Pam – not an official policy no, however it seems that Elk do graze on greens from recently harvested areas. It's probably a good question for our wildlife biologist (Molly).

Joe Saysell: Friends of the Cowichan – harvest in the headwater is affecting the river up and down, river went down, and new rain is helping. Spawning time and fishing are happening at the same time – steelhead are sparse, virtually collapsed and fishing in the upper headwaters should be closed. BC Flyfishing Federation, has been helping immensely on this, monitoring the lower river in January and February – most of the catches are only 6-7 pounds, which is a sure sign the big fish are nearly extinct. Another issue to be aware of is the impact of boat anchor dragging on spawning habitat.

Ian Morrison – comment - did bring up issues for closures at the meeting this past week, and the message was delivered.

Heather Pritchard – Forestry Presentation on Creating Connectivity in the Cowichan Landscape

Key Recommendations from the Studies - Mapping ecosystem services in the watershed and create policies to. Protect those values first, prior to defining cut-blocks and development to start to preserve and restore ecological integrity. Establish riparian setbacks based on ground-truth the assessments (soil health, maturity of growth, etc.,).

Cowichan Land Trust Perspective – wishes to see more of the private forested lands protected and public awareness of the value of forested habitats. Only 10% is currently protected – how much is enough? Research concludes that 50% of the landscape needs to be managed for conservation – to ensure we have ecosystem values protected. All of the remaining old-growth needs to be preserved and manage older blocks towards old-growth. Provide incentives to private landowners to preserve their forests rather than \$\$ to cut them down.

Discussion

Peter – comment – especially interested in the designation of riparian specific setbacks. Buffers and setbacks based on the width of streams, and typically just a number that we work with developers on.

Bruce – question – what is the next steps for the Cowichan Land Trust? Would love a talk with the Naturalists.

Joe – question – in the research on road numbers – did you look at logging methods of the past vs current methods? The old way was the right way – in terms of the roads, it was a better way (no roads), was a better way of logging. One of the biggest use of cedars was for building canoes, this was a cultural practice in the watershed that might be considered in the study.

Heather – answer – didn't really look at it in detail, however there was some of this knowledge on the team (qualitative discussion), but no in-depth analysis no.

Links from Chat:

Cole – Shared this Link for Information - Watershed Security Strategy and Fund Discussion Paper

<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/watershed-security-strategy-and-fund-discussion-paper/>

Edmond – Shared this Link for Information – Federal Sustainable Development Strategy:

<https://www.placespeak.com/en/topic/6547-the-federal-sustainable-development-strategy-fsds/#/overview>

Mosaic – Shared these Links for Information

<https://www.mosaicforests.com/news-views/bigcoast-forest-climate-initiative>

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-mosaic-forest-halts-logging-on-some-of-its-timberlands-as-it-opts-to/>

Peer Reviewed article that summarizes recent science on low-flows.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969720324438?via%3Dihub>

Genevieve- info on Burweed

<https://www.coastalisc.com/carpet-burweed/>

Cole Smith info re Taylor Park parking lot issue

A bit of overview on the case:

- Taylor Park is located just off Renfrew Road near the existing parking lot for the Kinsol Trestle
- Taylor Park is a CVRD jurisdiction park, but I think it's classed as a 'community park' – so it doesn't have signage etc.

- The CVRD received grant funding (~\$450,000) to update the Kinsol Trestle parking lot, and the proposal being considered is to take a portion of Taylor Park and convert it into a 100-vehicle parking lot, with sufficient ingress/egress to accommodate tour buses
- Concerns exist regarding peak flows of traffic and parking overflow from existing parking lot, which is often backed up down the rural road connecting Renfrew and the parking lot
 - The proposed advantage of parking in Taylor Park is the direct access from Renfrew Road
- March 2 there was a public information session (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leo9G_IlcUY&t=2369s) hosted by the CVRD
- Environmental assessments are pending
- Taylor Park appears to be an area with mixed forest, with some of the area being red alder recovering from logging/clearing for development ~20+ years ago
- Observers have seen salmon in at least one of the three creeks which flow through the area, and signage for salmon is present in the park

Future meetings:

April 21st – Bethany Coulthard, Cowichan Tribes Marine Projects

May 19th – Cheri Ayers, BC Restoration Fund for Salmon Stocks

June 16th - Jamieson Atkinson, BCCF, Trout in the Comox Watershed.

July 21st - approx. 9:30-3, details coming, Field Day at Stoltz Pool, Cowichan River Provincial Park