



Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

1845 Cowichan Bay Road, Cowichan Bay, BC

www.cowichanestuary.ca admin@cowichanestuary.ca

Annual Report 2016 – 2017

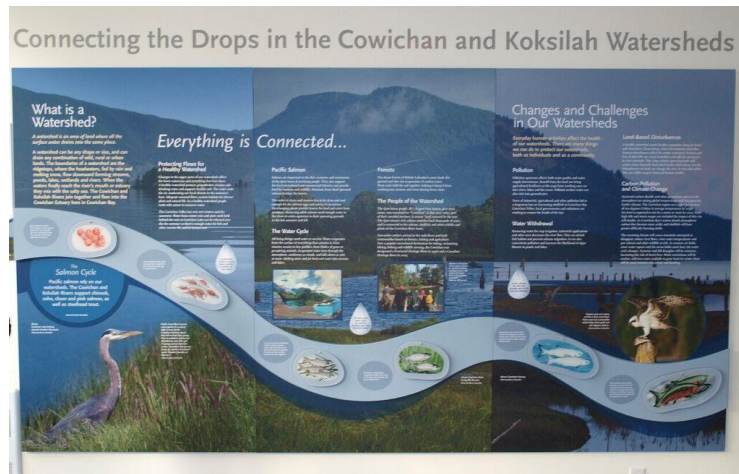


Introduction

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre in Hecate Park in Cowichan Bay, BC is an interpretive centre overlooking the Cowichan Estuary, a 400 hectare estuarine ecosystem in the unceded territory of the Quw'utsun people. The estuary provides vital habitat for resident and migratory birds, Pacific salmon, shellfish and a diversity of intertidal life. The Centre offers interactive educational opportunities for children and people of all ages to learn about the estuary, its marine and bird life, its natural and cultural history, and the Cowichan & Koksilah watersheds of which it is a part. Our indoor classroom has both freshwater and inter-tidal aquariums and a touch tank. We have microscopes, a wildlife viewing telescope, interactive displays and maps. Outdoors visitors can climb the wildlife viewing platform and explore the estuary's increasing biological diversity on our interpretive trails. The estuary was degraded over a number of decades. Education and awareness are critical to the estuary's ongoing recovery. Education, restoration activities, environmental monitoring and ecological management are all making a difference.

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Year – April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017

On April 29, 2016 we opened the first phase of our Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds exhibit created in partnership with the Royal BC Museum (RBCM). The exhibit is focused on the water cycle, an interactive story of the salmon cycle and how everything in the watershed is connected. We also honoured retiring Watershed Board Coordinator, Rodger Hunter, who was recognized as a local watershed superhero at this event.



The Centre remains an inviting open space with a wildlife mural, three-dimensional eelgrass meadow and a number of interactive displays. The fresh water aquarium is home to Coho salmon fry and our salt water aquarium and touch tank have lots of Shiner Perch and a range of both colorful and camouflaged intertidal creatures.



We have a video station with a series of short videos of local First Nations elders, biologists, conservationists and historians talking about the historical, cultural and biological importance of the estuary. An interactive touch screen map provides information on many aspects of the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds, and a three-dimensional wall model of our watersheds is a favorite stop for visitors.

By the end of 2017 we will be ready to install the second phase of our Watershed exhibit, also co-created with RBCM, an eight-by-five three-dimensional map of the lower Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds on which we will be able to project animated and beautifully illustrated stories of its history, biodiversity, challenges and restoration at the touch of a button. This project is also supported by the Pacific Salmon Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment, Telus, the Cowichan Watershed Board, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Cowichan Valley Regional District and many local business and private donors.

Visitors

Since opening on April 21, 2012 we have had over 19,000 visitors. We now host from 3,500 to 5,000 visitors each year, with a good mix of tourists and local residents. New temporary displays and new visiting creatures in the touch tank bring many visitors back for repeat visits. We are open to the public Wednesday through Sunday afternoon in the summer and Thursday through Sunday afternoons from September to June. We are also open holiday Mondays and will add more open hours as we grow our volunteer team.

School Watershed & Marine Biology Programs

We have developed hands-on marine conservation and science-oriented school programming for different grades and ages, linked and kept up-to-date with the Province's prescribed learning outcomes for each grade. We have also partnered with the Cowichan Watershed Board to deliver a Cowichan River and Watershed program focused on grades four and five. This year we again had over 1,000 students participate in our school program offerings.



Our school programs are a popular educational resource for both public schools within School District 79 and private schools. We also provide programming for S.E.A. Programs, a residential ocean learning program for students from Calgary. In October our marine educator, Madeline Southern, offered program volunteers the opportunity to visit the S.E.A. program's sailing vessels in Sidney. Overall we delivered 44 programs this year with participants ranging from pre-schoolers to young adults.

We also host Professional Development Days for teachers to assist them in integrating river, ocean and estuary-related knowledge into their classrooms.

For pre-school aged children Kerrie Talbot, a dedicated volunteer and retired children's librarian, has been hosting regular story-time events in the spring and fall for children and parents since 2012. This year she teamed up with her library colleague Judy Baxter to offer the Mother Goose pre-school program which was very well received.



Summer Science Camps

In 2016 we held five week-long full-day summer science camps for school-aged children 5 to 7 years-old and 8 to 10 years-old. Campers participate in beach seine netting, bird surveys, expeditions through the estuary, explorations aided by microscope and telescope, and create nature-related arts and crafts.



In the above photo camp leader Miranda Prescott supports a group of enthusiastic five to seven year-olds in doing a beach seine and learning about the diversity of intertidal life up close. We also offer an annual four-day Youth Leadership Program.



Community Education and Events



The Nature Centre regularly hosts and participates in community events that increase outreach and access to environmental education. On May 7th we once again were part of hosting International Low Tide Day. We had a beach seine, the annual Low Tide critter count, music and food at Kil-pah-las beach in Cowichan Bay.



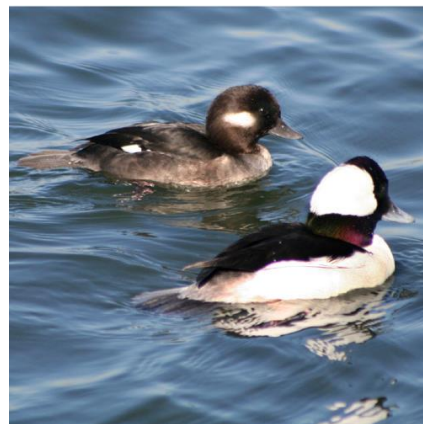
We also offered a number of presentations and film showings throughout the year. In the fall, as a part of the Somenos Marsh Society's month-long Wild Wings Festival welcoming back the Trumpeter Swans, we showed the film "Winged Migration". We also hosted a presentation by renowned bird song recordist John Neville on Bird Song in the Boreal Forest. In January 2017 we showed "Found in the Forest", a documentary about the public Environmental School in

Maple Ridge, BC, where teachers, researchers and parents work together, primarily out in nature, challenging conventional educational models. Local educator Krista Crowther was our guest speaker. In March 2017 we screened the film “Ancient Sea Gardens: Mystery of the Pacific Northwest” with a discussion of First Nations clam gardens facilitated by Cowichan Tribes biologist Tim Kulchyski.

We also, once again, organized and participated in the Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-up for BC Rivers Day in September 2016.

Citizen Science

The Nature Centre continues to partner with Bird Studies Canada to complete monthly bird surveys identifying and counting shore birds found along a designated stretch of shore in Cowichan Bay. Volunteers, who go out monthly in all weather, also identify, count, and report any dead birds found on the beach. This citizen-based science initiative has been ongoing at the Centre since 2013. Bird survey dates are on the Nature Centre website. No experience is required to participate.



We continue to actively keep an eye on the Pacific Great Blue Herons, the fannini subspecies nesting in the ravine near the Centre. Found only on the Pacific Coast between Prince William Sound in Alaska and Puget Sound in Washington State, they are listed as a species of concern under Canada’s Species at Risk Act (SARA). The Cowichan Bay colony remains the largest on Vancouver Island. In nesting season in early March upwards of 60 herons were spotted flying in a circular formation near the Nature Centre – quite a sight. Trudy Chatwin, Species at Risk Biologist for BC’s Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations monitors the site with the support of local volunteers.



Volunteering & Staffing

Our volunteers and our regular donors are the real backbone and key to the success of the Estuary Nature Centre, allowing us to keep our doors open to visitors and offer accessible educational programming. When you stop in to visit, it is a volunteer who is there to answer your questions. Our school programs also rely heavily on volunteer support. We're eager to include more interested community members on our volunteer team and we offer regular orientations for new volunteers and updates and knowledge-building events to support our seasoned volunteers, whose contributions are so essential to our work.

In the fall we said a sad farewell to long-time Centre Coordinator Meghan Loop, who was off to study midwifery in Ontario, and welcomed Todd Carnahan to our team. Continuing with us, Aquaria Technician Jared Bates has kept our systems functioning and Marine Educator Madeleine Southern continues to lead programming and update curricula. In partnership with Canada Summer Jobs, we were once again lucky to have a great team of summer students who provided leadership in our marine biology camp program.



In December we held a Volunteer Appreciation evening with refreshments, a series of short and engaging slide presentations from volunteers, and recognized Eric and Dorothy Marshall as our "Volunteers of the Year", pictured above. Thank-you Eric and Dorothy! We also had a free "bring-your-own-popcorn" showing of "The Big Year" to close 2016. In March 2017 volunteer Natasha Ayers organized Sunday afternoon drop-in yoga classes at the Centre by donation with several local yoga teachers volunteering their time to lead the classes. And we did a volunteer survey to help us learn how to support our volunteers better, as they are such a central part of the hard-working team that keeps the Centre running.

Our History - The 2011 -2012 Journey to Create the Nature Centre

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre was conceived in February 2011 by a small group of local Cowichan Bay residents, including parents, educators, naturalists, fishermen and business people, who saw the Estuary as both a natural treasure and also an ecosystem at risk from development and industrial activities.



Working under the Cowichan Land Trust, a non-profit society and registered charity that holds conservation covenants, we received development funding from the West Coast Community Adjustment Program (WestCCAP), Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), and raised money through local fundraising events and partnerships with the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and the Rotary Club of Duncan.

The development project included a 1,000 square foot nature classroom, a Green Shores restoration of eroded shoreline at the west end of Hecate Park, outdoor interpretive signage and maps that show the diversity of life in the estuary and its rich intertidal zone. A path through the park along the waterfront leads to the wildlife viewing platform with views looking up the Koksilah and Cowichan Rivers to the west, north toward Mt. Tzouhalem and east toward Salt Spring Island and the Salish Sea.



The Centre's indoor classroom, built on the eastern edge of Hecate Park has large windows overlooking the estuary's intertidal zone and eelgrass meadows. It is just a short walk to the foreshore. The Centre officially opened April 21, 2012 with music, First Nations dancers and a crowd of about 250 people.



Since the Centre opened its doors the surrounding greenspace has been expanded to include the Cowichan Bay Marine Gateway to the west which includes a naturescape play area, picnic shelter, public kayak launch and parking area.

We look forward to many more years of offering visitors and school groups opportunities to learn about the Cowichan Estuary and the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds. The Centre's hands-on approach to environmental education for youth and families is a balance between

Your Donations Make All the Difference

Gift Shop

WATER BOTTLES
\$16

NATURE CENTRE GIFT SHOP PRICES

ITEM	PRICE
CHILDREN'S BOOKS	\$4.95
ADULT BOOKS	\$9.95
CHILDREN'S TOYS	\$4.95
ADULT TOYS	\$9.95
CHILDREN'S CLOTHING	\$4.95
ADULT CLOTHING	\$9.95

PEACE DANCER
MAY HENRY TRIVETT
WINDMILL BOOKS

CLOUDWALKER
MAY HENRY TRIVETT
WINDMILL BOOKS

ORCA CHASE
MAY HENRY TRIVETT
WINDMILL BOOKS



Financial Report

As a small centre we are careful with our finances. We are committed to offering accessible educational programs that are affordable within the budgets of families and the public school system, and to having admission to the centre accessible to all visitors, regardless of income. We suggest an admission donation of \$5. Each donation really makes a difference. Our doors are open and we don't turn visitors away.

In our first five years (2012-17) the Nature Centre has been successful in obtaining grants to develop impressive educational programs and exhibits. While operational funding is harder to find, since our inception ongoing operations (programming and overhead) have generally broken even financially, but only through extremely frugal management – something we don't believe is sustainable over the long term. In order to be economically healthy the Nature Centre needs to bring in an additional \$30,000 annually in operational funding to continue to do citizen-science and restoration projects, and to provide high quality public education and school and summer camp programming – activities that provide essential support for the protection and restoration of the biological diversity of our estuary.

This year we invested in developing new revenue streams and exploring new opportunities to make the centre a sustainable and self-supporting place of learning. While this investing in the future has left us with a short-term year-end deficit, we are confident that our efforts to grow our financial base will bear fruit in the coming year.

We've been holding one or two Beer and Burger fundraising events each year at the Cowichan Bay Pub, which are lots of fun and include live music and a silent auction. Our September 2016 Beer and Burger raised \$2,500. These events continue to be a success because of ongoing local support, including the generous donations of silent auction items by local businesses and individuals. Expanding our annual donor program, and especially our base of monthly donors, is another priority. The generosity of our supporters and donors makes a huge difference to what we can do.

Thank you so much for your support!



**Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre
Financial Report
April 2016 to March 2017**

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS	TOTAL	Operations	Programs	Interpretive Display Development	Store
INCOME					
Donations, Fundraising, Dues	8,662	7,738	224	700	-
Nature Centre Grants	60,508	27,500	21,855	11,153	-
Nature Centre Activities	18,709	40	16,437	-	2,233
Total Income	87,880	35,278	38,516	11,853	2,233
EXPENSES					
Project & Program Costs	10,149	2,635	2,833	3,097	1,585
Personnel Costs	53,191	24,736	28,455	-	-
Facility Costs	21,921	13,165	-	8,757	-
Administration & Other	4,848	4,744	95	-	10
Total Operating Expenses	90,110	45,280	31,382	11,853	1,594
Net Operating Income	(2,231)	(10,002)	7,133	-	638
Capital Asset Activity	(10,364)	(8,261)	-	(2,103)	-
Net Income	(12,594)	(18,263)	7,133	(2,103)	638
OPERATING SURPLUS (DEFICIT)					
Beginning operating surplus (deficit)	(205)				
Net operating income (loss) for the year	(2,231)				
Ending operating surplus (deficit)	(2,435)				