



# Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

1845 Cowichan Bay Road, Cowichan Bay, BC

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## Annual Report 2020



### 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 traditional and unceded territory of the Quw'utsun people, who have cared for these lands and waters for thousands of years. 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, youth and adults 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 intertidal aquariums and a touch tank. We have microscopes, a wildlife viewing telescope, interactive displays and maps. Outdoors visitors can climb our wildlife viewing platform and explore the estuary's increasing biological diversity on our interpretive trails. The estuary was degraded over a number of decades. As part of our work, we offer volunteers, school and youth groups opportunities to engage in hands-on restoration projects. Awareness-raising, conservation, restoration, and environmental monitoring are all critical to the estuary's ongoing recovery. We are making a difference.

## The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre – January 1 to December 31, 2020

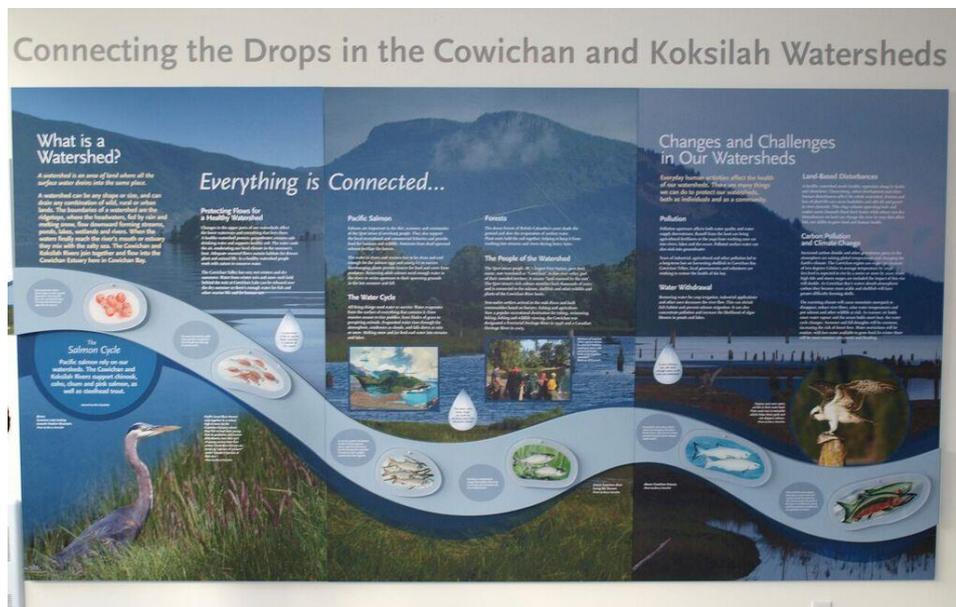
### Adapting Hands-on Nature Education in the Year of Covid-19

2020 was a year for being nimble and flexible with our programs and plans while keeping our visitors, volunteers, and staff safe in an ever-unfolding year of global pandemic.

Most often the Centre, an inviting open classroom with a wildlife mural, three-dimensional eelgrass meadow and many interactive exhibits, is home base for our programs. We're usually open to the public Thursday through Sunday afternoons, plus holiday Mondays, and hosting school programs the other days of the week. Our freshwater aquarium, home to Coho salmon fry, and our saltwater aquarium and touch tank, with many colorful and camouflaged intertidal creatures, draw visitors of all ages as soon as they come through the door.



Our wall-sized Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds exhibit, created in partnership with the Royal BC Museum (RBCM), is focused on the water cycle, an interactive story of the salmon cycle, how everything in a watershed is connected, and the challenges we currently face from climate disruption in our watersheds.



It's paired with an eight-by-five, three-dimensional map of the lower Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds on which are projected stories of the watersheds' biodiversity, challenges, and ongoing restoration efforts. It also covers the history of the estuary from the last ice age to the present day, beautifully illustrated and narrated. Co-created with RBCM the project was 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 businesses and private donors. It complements our video station with

local First Nations' Elders, biologists, conservationists, and historians out on the estuary talking about its historical, cultural and biological importance (also [here](#) on our website). And we are a lot more than a physical space to visit. Most of all, we are about people loving, learning about, and caring for nature in this place where we live.

**Covid-19 and its impacts** made 2020 a challenging year. Covid affected our open hours, our school programs, all of our events and many of our fundraising opportunities. We had a calm start to the year in January, welcoming Amy Clinton-Baker joining us as Centre Coordinator as Alicia Taylor began her maternity leave – a good beginning and smooth transition.

Then, on March 17<sup>th</sup>, in response to the unfolding pandemic, we closed our doors to public drop-in visits to keep everyone safe. By July, with infection rates declining and our Covid protocols in place, we re-opened for shorter hours on weekends, which fit well with simultaneously offering of our Covid-adapted, 5-day outdoor children's summer camps. Protocols included masks indoors, contact tracing, physical distancing measures, a plexiglass screen barrier at our welcome station, hand sanitizer and increased cleaning procedures, none of which got in the way of a fun, learning-filled summer.

### Visitors

Since opening on April 21, 2012, we've had over 34,000 visitors to the Centre. In 2020, visitor numbers were down 75% compared to the previous year, from 4,500 in 2019 to 1,143 this year, with 692 of those visits happening pre-Covid between January 1 and March 17<sup>th</sup>.



We're grateful to be here in such a beautiful place on the shores of the estuary, where visitors have many places close by in nature to explore, even when our doors are closed. Our wildlife viewing platform has a panoramic view of the estuary and is a great place for spotting some of the estuary's abundant bird life. The trail along the shore has beautiful interpretive signage, making a walk in nature even more of a learning experience. The signs include pictures of local birds, animals and plants with their names in English, Latin, and in Hul'q'umi'num', the language of the Quw'utsun People on whose traditional and unceded territory we have the privilege to be, grateful for their care for these lands and waters over thousands of years.

### Education Programming

The Centre offers hands-on nature conservation and science-oriented school programming for grades and ages from pre-school through grade twelve on-site at Hecate Park. Programs are linked with the province of BC's prescribed learning outcomes. This year, due to Covid, out of 37 pre-booked school programs, only 14 were able to be delivered. Most of these were to smaller classes or homeschool groups local to the area.

We also needed to alter who on our education team delivered our school programs, using more of our paid educators rather than inviting school program volunteers to assist, as many of our volunteers are wonderful, retired naturalists who are also over 65, and therefore at increased risk from Covid exposure.

Our school programs are a popular educational resource for both public schools within School District 79 and local private schools and home school groups. We look forward to being able to offer more hands-on educational programs, integrating river, ocean, and estuary-related knowledge, in the not-too-distant future. Meanwhile, in addition to working with smaller groups, this year we have focused on creating some fun, online videos and educational resources, posting them on our website and on social media to support teachers and parents in supporting children learning outside in the natural world in this challenging time.

### Sea Squirts Pre-School Program

Before the pandemic was upon us, Kerrie Talbot, dedicated Nature Centre volunteer and retired pre-school teacher and library assistant, hosted her “Sea Squirts” series on Thursdays in February 2020. Fifty-five children attended, along with 36 adults, over the four sessions.

This drop-in program offers parents with pre-school children and infants an opportunity to come together, learn about nature in fun and engaging ways, meet a “feature creature” from the touch tank, all while supporting the development of early literacy skills through nature stories.



### Summer Nature and Science Camps

By July and August 2020, with Covid protocols in place, we were able to offer six, five-day all-day Summer Nature and Science Camps for school-aged children 5 to 7 and 7 to 9 years-old, plus three single-day camps in the first week of August. Over the summer 102 campers enthusiastically participated in watershed adventures, beach seines, mud digs, bird surveys, expeditions through the estuary, and explorations aided by microscope and telescope. They learned about the diversity of intertidal life up close, and about how all life in a watershed is interconnected, getting their hands and feet in the mud, having fun, and creating nature-related arts and crafts along the way.



Karlie Castle was back with us as summer camp coordinator again, along with camp leader Lauren McIlroy – what a great team! The Cowichan Valley Naturalists provide two summer camp bursaries. The Nature Centre also has a bursary fund for children and youth for all our summer programs to reduce financial barriers so more children and youth can learn in nature. We're always happy to accept your donations to our bursary fund.

### **The Climate Connection - riparian restoration & water conservation Year-2 of our 26-month Eco-Action Project**

The climate crisis continues to affect ecosystems around the world. Yet climate impacts often require specific place-based solutions. In the spring of 2019, we received Eco-Action funding from the federal Ministry of Environment and Climate Change for a 26-month project, "Conserving & Protecting Cowichan Fresh Water for a Climate Resilient Future". By June last year the project was in full swing, working with youth on hands-on riparian restoration in both the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds and on water conservation projects in the Koksilah. On January 11, taking a break from hands-on restoration work, we held our official project launch with a full house of project partners and supporters at the Centre.



**Riparian restoration** Just as project lead Sierra Harvey was getting ready to head into another watershed restoration season in March, Covid-19 arrived. This meant reworking plans to accommodate smaller teams, creating work plans to support appropriate physical distancing and assigning individual tools rather than sharing. Sierra led a creative and successful 2020 project season, engaging 146 youth in 11 days of removing invasives, planting native species and completing 1,220 square metres of riparian restoration in the the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds. This year's activities included working with Cowichan Elders, families and youth planting 65 cedar, fir and pine seedlings for International Tree Day in March, and a live-staking workshop led by Dave Polster, with Genevieve Singleton, Cowichan Elder Philomena Williams, and 15 youth at Stoltz Bluff on the Cowichan River in November.



In August, as the summer warmed, we focused on **water conservation** in the Koksilah Watershed, continuing with household water audits, and refurbishing of a drip irrigation system to save water. On September 12<sup>th</sup> we gathered community volunteers of all ages together at the Hub, safely distanced, and took this community photo - Yes, those are people lying on the ground – to send this message: If Koksilah householders and gardeners can reduce water use by 50% it will make a huge difference!



**Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre organized this community photo in support of water conservation in the Koksilah.**

**The group is helping residents implement garden irrigation improvements to reduce their water use by 50%.**

The event was supported by Warmland Dance, Cowichan Watershed Board, and local volunteers. Photos by Jens Barsballe and Frank Wall (Sept 12 2020)



For next year, we're organizing a drip irrigation workshop for residents of the Koksilah who want to learn to install or fix their own drip irrigation system as a way to reduce their water footprint, and match the efforts that local farmers are making to reduce water use.

**Youth Leadership Training** was also Covid-adapted in 2020. May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> a group of local young leaders, including a number from Cowichan Valley Earth Guardians, gathered for two interactive Zoom sessions on group process and engagement organizing with facilitator Peter Gibbs. Jared Williams from Cowichan Tribes opened the session online from the river with his flute and a territorial welcome.

We thank our principal funder, Environment and Climate Change Canada, as well as these ongoing supporters, partners, and sponsors: Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Watershed Board, the Cowichan Community Land Trust, the BC Conservation Foundation, the Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, including Areas D and E, the Municipality of North Cowichan, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society, the Outdoor Education Society, Sh-hwuykwselu Busy Place Streamkeepers, BC Nature Trust, SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, the Cowichan Valley Earth Guardians, Youth 2020 Cowichan, School District 79, and Polster Environmental Services.

## Events

We successfully offered a reduced number of in-person events in the summer and fall, each with Covid protocols in place. Others were adapted to online delivery, and some, like our Beer and Burger fundraisers, will have to wait for better times. In the absence of in-person fundraisers, we are especially grateful to Island Return-It in Duncan for having us as their Charity-of-the-Month in July, and to all the generous folks who brought in your recyclables. It made a big difference in a challenging year to be the grateful recipients of a \$8,850!

## CENC B'EarthDay

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, Earth Day, was our day to celebrate the Centre's 8th "B'EarthDay", our anniversary of opening. Separated by Covid-distancing, our creative Co-ordinator Amy put together this [video](#) with the voices of children and volunteers wishing the Centre a Happy B'EarthDay to mark the day!



## Low Tide Day

June 6th, 2020 was International Low Tide Day - the 21st Low Tide Day to be celebrated in Cowichan Bay. With Covid-19, we couldn't gather on Kil-pah-las Beach or in large numbers, and thanks to Nature Centre educators Madeline Southern, Sarah Rosen & Tessa Stiven, a much smaller group was able to gather and explore the still magical world to be found when the tide goes out. They also captured some magical [video](#) footage of the day, including a brief history of Low Tide Day described by one of our local celebration's founders, John Scull.



## Eelgrass Restoration

We were excited to work together again with SeaChange Marine Conservation Society and Cowichan Tribes to prepare eelgrass for transplanting August 24<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>. This year we had contact tracing sign-ins and other Covid protocols, and that did not deter 107 volunteers from coming out to be part of restoring our local eelgrass meadows over the six days. Spread out on the lawn in front of the Centre and down on the beach, volunteers gathered to tie native eelgrass rhizomes, harvested by SeaChange Marine Conservation Society's divers, and get

them ready for replanting. Native eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is a critical component of estuarine ecosystems, supporting salmon, birds, and a wide range of invertebrate life.



### Whole Watershed Thinking

The evening of August 29<sup>th</sup>, the last day of eelgrass restoration, over 40 people spread out on the lawn in the park overlooking the estuary at the Nature Centre to hear Cowichan Tribes' biologist Tim Kulchyski, SeaChange's Nikki Wright, and consulting biologist Cheri Ayers offer us a window beyond the estuary into "Whole Watershed Thinking". They talked about how everything is interconnected, and how what happens upstream affects the health and wellbeing of our watershed downstream all the way to the estuary and ocean. As Tim so eloquently described, everything that has ever happened – everything that humans have ever done over thousands of years to either protect or degrade the watershed - including all that we humans are doing now, has an impact. Thank you to Tim, Nikki and Cheri, and to the generations of Quw'utsun People before them, for their stewardship of these waters, and for inspiring us to be mindful of the big picture in caring for our local waters today.



## Eric Marshall's 90th Birthday Celebration

Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup> we celebrated Eric Marshall, and his many contributions to science, nature, and our local community, with a drop-in birthday "party" attended by 90+ people at the Nature Centre for his 90th Birthday.



# Happy 90th Birthday

## Eric Marshall

Drop in anytime between 1 & 4pm and honour Eric for a lifetime of dedication to Nature and Community.

Eric asks that instead of a gift or card please consider a [donation to the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre](#).

(click to donate now)



*Coffee, Tea and Cake provided... bring a mug!*



## Citizen Science

The 400-hectare Cowichan Estuary, with its marshes, mudflats, and tidal rivers, is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) providing habitat for up to 230 resident and migratory bird species, with annual monitoring of Trumpeter Swan, Pacific Great Blue Herons and Iceland Gulls numbers.

Since 2013 the Nature Centre has also partnered with Birds Canada to complete monthly bird surveys identifying and counting water and shore birds found along a designated stretch of shoreline in Cowichan Bay. Volunteers also go out monthly in all weather to identify, count, and report any dead birds found on the beach. In 2020 smaller groups gathered each month to continue the water and shore bird surveys.



We also keep a close eye on the Pacific Great Blue Herons (fannini subspecies) nesting in the ravine near the Centre. Found only on the Pacific Coast between Alaska's Prince William Sound and Washington's Puget Sound, they are a species of concern under Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA). The Cowichan Bay colony remains one of the largest on Vancouver Island, with more than 100 nests and is regularly monitored by a BC Species at Risk Biologist and local volunteers.

## Remembering

**Eric Marshall** (Oct 25, 1930-Dec 17, 2020) and **John Scull** (May 10, 1943-July 24, 2020)

**(Kenneth)Eric Marshall** - We celebrated Eric's 90th Birthday, and his still active life, on October 25<sup>th</sup>. He died on December 17<sup>th</sup>, after complications from surgery, with his wife Dorothy and daughter Karina at his side.

Eric lived his life in service to community and the natural world. He had a deep knowledge and love of creatures large and small, from the tiniest nudibranch and all things aquatic, to birds of all kinds and the giant Humpback Whales that travel up and down our coast. He had a great gift for sharing his knowledge and love with others, to the special delight of children at our touch tank. This love of the natural world was a love he also shared with Dorothy, his long-time partner in his life's adventures.



Eric grew up in England, a marine zoologist and archivist, and was recruited to come to Winnipeg to create the world-class scientific research collection that bore his name: the Eric Marshall Aquatic Research Library at the Freshwater Institute, University of Manitoba campus - one of seven regional Department of Fisheries and Oceans libraries lost to Ottawa's cost-cutting in 2013 - a terrible blow to Eric and to the scientific community. The sign from the library, retrieved by his son Ken and brought to Cowichan Bay, was on display at Eric's birthday celebration. Eric was the Nature Centre's librarian ever since we began in 2012.

Eric and Dorothy moved to Cowichan Bay in August 1996. Visiting the floating Marine Ecology Station in Cowichan Bay was early



on Eric's list. As Eric told it, Marine Biologist Bill Austen greeted him saying, "Great to have you as a volunteer - I'd like to go to a sponge conference in Australia and you can look after the Station while I'm away!" Eric became the Station's Treasurer and when it moved to Sidney in 2001, he went with Bill in his boat as it was towed there.

When the Estuary Nature Centre opened in 2012, Eric joined our Operations Committee, and served on the Board when we became a separate charitable society. He was Vice Chair until his death. He was a dedicated volunteer and teacher at our fresh and saltwater aquaria and touch tank, much loved by visitors of all ages, including our many school groups. He also took amazing photos of the animals and plants in the tanks, labelling and describing them in a binder which remains a wonderful resource.



Ever the meticulous science librarian, Eric also prepared notes on each creature to support other volunteers in providing information to visitors. While he was at the touch tank, Dorothy was often on the viewing platform with school groups teaching them the birds on the Bay, with notes prepared by Eric to expand on the life history of local birds, along with a long piece of cord with key tags marking the wing spans of common birds that Eric prepared to provide a better idea of their sizes.

Eric was a keen photographer for us and for other nature groups in the Valley. Eric and Dorothy were honoured as the Nature Centre's volunteers of the year in 2016.



Eric was a member of the Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society (CVNS) since arriving in the Valley. He worked with DFO on surveys of juvenile salmonids in the Bay for many years, hauling in the seine net while DFO staff counted the fish. Eric and Dorothy were regulars on the Valley's November to March annual Swan and Goose counts, as well as at Birds Canada's monthly waterbird counts on Cowichan Bay's south shore. In winter he made monthly counts of beached birds. Previously, as a volunteer with DFO's Cetacean Watch, he was called out to check beached seal or sea lion bodies washed up in the Bay. He became CVNS secretary in 1997, served as president from 2004 - 2019, edited the CVNS newsletter, and was CVNS' rep at the Cowichan Stewardship Round Table. He also sat on the Board of the Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society and on an advisory group for the Cowichan Watershed Board. Eric was honoured as a CVNS life member in 2019, when he also took on the role of caretaker for the Cowichan Estuary Important Bird Area.

Between 2005 and 2008 Eric and Dorothy spent time each winter in Hawaii working with a humpback whale research team based on Maui monitoring the comeback of the previously endangered humpback

whales. Eric's many photos of humpback whale tails were added to the Happywhale database, and he regularly received notices telling him where his whales were seen. Most spent the summer months feeding in Alaska, although three headed to Kamchatka one summer. One of the whales he and Dorothy saw in Hawaii regularly showed up in Alaska and then one summer decided to head south to Mexico. Eric provided many informative talks throughout the Valley on the Humpback Comeback.

A promotional poster for a talk titled "HUMPBACK COMEBACK! WITH ERIC MARSHALL". The background is a photograph of a humpback whale breaching the water. Text on the poster includes: "Whaling in BC reduced humpback whales by almost 90%. Now, numbers are close to levels before whaling started!", "Come learn about this important species, as well as the science behind the story of how the humpback whales in the North Pacific have recovered.", "WEDNESDAY NOV 21, 7PM", and "Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre, 1845 Cowichan Bay Road, www.cowichanestuary.ca".

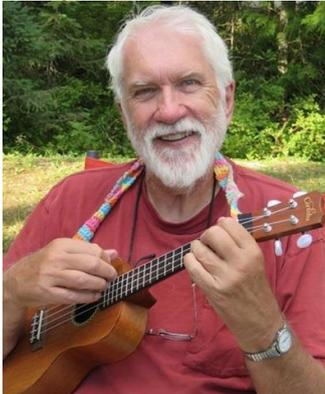
Together with Dorothy, Eric was a member of Duncan United Church, a volunteer with the Cowichan Historical Society, the Chemainus Theatre, the Cowichan Theatre, the local Friends of the Library Society, and a teacher/presenter for Elder College, as well as a member of the Elder College Advisory Committee. A gentleman and scholar, wise, kind, and often with a twinkle in his eye - we miss you Eric.

**John Scull** was a valued and long-standing member of the Cowichan Valley's naturalist community and a co-founder of the Cowichan Community Land Trust, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Inclusive Leadership Coop, Cowichan Bay's Low Tide Day, and the Cowichan Estuary



Nature Centre, and served on many of these community non-profit boards. His life of devotion to the natural world fuelled his passion for protecting ecosystems in the Cowichan Valley and educating people about why that matters.

He left us on July 24th, in the morning “as the finches began to sing”, surrounded by his children, grandchildren and his spouse Linda Hill, for what he described as “his next journey”.



A fourth generation Californian, and generally the tallest person in a crowd, John travelled the world pursuing his wide-ranging interests - science, particularly astronomy, reading, chess, music, philosophy, psychology, sailing, and camping – and raising a family with his first partner Jeri. He eventually settled in the Cowichan Valley in 1973, working at Cedar Lodge, a school for children with learning disabilities, where he met Linda.

He fell in love with Vancouver Island, although he still made time for travel, adventure, and intercultural learnings. He and Linda went to Micronesia and then to the Solomon Islands as CUSO volunteers, which had a deep impact on both of their lives, including endless sources of stories, inspiration, and friendships. But he always came back to the Cowichan Valley, where



he and Linda threw themselves into what mattered most to them: diversity, inclusion, community, conservation, eco-psychology, and the Earth Charter.

His sense of curiosity and wonder about the natural world led him to the work of Joseph Cornell, and to find his joy in learning and sharing his wonder with children (especially his grandkids) and young people of all ages through teaching and mentorship. He was involved with the Valley’s Young Naturalists, volunteered at the Nature Centre with his granddaughter, and he and Linda led trainings for the Centre’s summer camp leader teams for many years.

He delighted in playing the ukulele on whatever occasions arose, always prompting smiles and often sing-alongs, and was a founding member of the ongoing itinerate estuary band, the “Mud Buddies” who played at the Nature Centre’s opening on Earth Day in 2012, and at many Low Tide Days and Earth Day celebrations since.



As an eco-psychologist, John was also a part of founding the Canadian Mental Health Association’s Cowichan Valley branch, and connected the ecological dots between the wellness of the wild world and human well-being. He had a down-to-Earth way of meeting people where they are at in their own ecological awareness.

Most recently, in the face of the unfolding ecological and climate crises, John facilitated workshops and a local discussion group on “Drawdown - a comprehensive plan to address global warming” to give people a sense of hope and agency in these crises.

We miss you John.

## Volunteers, Supporters & Staff

Our volunteers and our regular donors are the 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. Eric and John were two of those backbone people. Generally, when you stop in to visit, it is a volunteer who is there to answer your questions, and volunteers regularly support our school programs. It's been hard in this time of Covid-19 to not be seeing each other in person regularly. Our periodic newsletters and online platforms like Zoom are useful, and they're not quite the same.

We anticipate, as more of us get double-vaccinated, that we will be able to open our doors to visitors again in the year to come – still with Covid protocols in place. We also look forward to a time in the not-too-distant future when we can gather again in person more regularly at the Centre and in the community, and when we can again include more interested community members on our volunteer team.

We've also been so lucky to be able to get together outdoors in nature and work together. In November, a team of volunteers from the Estuary Nature Centre and the Cowichan Valley Naturalists renewed plantings of native species along the trail through Hecate Park. Next year we have plans for new signage along the trail explaining why these plants are an important part of our Cowichan Bay intertidal ecosystem and in helping prevent tidal erosion.



We want to thank our staff, Amy Clinton-Baker and Sierra (Harvey) Stacey, our aquarist Madeline Southern, our dynamite educator team, and all our amazing volunteers and supporters for your flexibility, creativity, and support in these times. It means so much.

## Celebrating our Volunteer Team

Covid-19 also meant a temporary pause to in-person volunteer gatherings - no summer BBQ or end-of-year holiday gathering in 2020. We did continue to recognize a "Volunteers of the Year". This year we thanked Stephen Bishop, via Zoom, for his consistent help, both when we could be open for visitors and through Covid closures, with school groups, and with the care and maintenance of our touch tank. He built a fantastic display board for the Centre and brought in his partner Margaret's nature-themed cards to raise funds for our work.



## Our History - The 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 an ecosystem at risk from development and industrial activities.



Initially 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) and Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), and raised money through local fundraising events, supported by partnerships with the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, and the Rotary Club of Duncan. We opened our doors in April 2012.

In the spring of 2019, we become our own separate charitable non-profit, the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society, making the full transition from under the wings of the Land Trust on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. Our fiscal year now aligns with the calendar year.

Our development project included a 1,000 square foot nature classroom, our first Green Shores restoration of eroded shoreline at the west end of Hecate Park, and outdoor interpretive signage and maps that show the diversity of life in the estuary's rich intertidal zone. A path through the park along the waterfront leads to our 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, its changing tides and eelgrass meadows. It's just a short walk to the shore. The Centre officially opened Earth Day weekend in April 2012, with music, First Nations dancers and a crowd of about 250 people.

The surrounding greenspace has been expanded by CVRD Parks to include the Cowichan Bay Marine Gateway to the west with a naturescape play area, picnic shelter, public kayak launch and parking area.



We look forward to many more years of offering visitors, school groups, and families opportunities to learn about the Cowichan Estuary and the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds through our hands-on approach to environmental education, balancing science and stewardship to inspire those who come our way to love, care for and protect the natural environment, including increasing opportunities for youth to learn leadership and teambuilding skills while working on riparian restoration in our watersheds.

### Gift Shop

We have a small gift shop that helps support the Centre's operations, primarily from selling t-shirts, water bottles, field guides, nature books, including some beautiful children's books, small and large animal puppets, colouring books and cards. We also have some beautiful pieces of local art for sale. We accept cash, cheques and INTERAC for debit for purchases.



### Our Supporters' Donations Make All the Difference

If you love nature and value nature education please support the Nature Centre by making a donation. Consider becoming an Estuary Nature Centre supporter by making a monthly gift to the Centre. You can also apply to become a member of the Society for \$20. Charitable receipts are issued for all donations of \$20 or more, including memberships. Donations can be made to the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre through [Canada Helps](#).

**Thank-you!**

## Financial Report

You will find our 2020 Year End Financial Statement at the end of this 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. Admission to the Centre is by donation and each donation makes a difference. Except when Covid protocols get in the way, our doors are open to the public four days a week and we don't turn visitors away.

Over the years the Nature Centre has been successful in doing community-based fundraising and in obtaining grants to develop engaging nature and science-based exhibits and education and restoration programs. Over our first 7 years (2012-2018) we built a solid structure of both interpretive elements and people – our committees, volunteer teams, supporter-base, and community partnerships, operating on an essentially break-even basis. Over the past two years (2019-2020), as we fledged from the Cowichan Land Trust to become our own charitable non-profit society and, with the support of our donors and some significant successful fundraising in 2019, we've been able to start building reserves. We have a growing bursary fund, as well as an emergency fund to support our ongoing resilience in the face a world that seems increasingly unpredictable. A huge "Thank-you!" to all our supporters who contributed to our fundraising efforts in 2019 and 2020. There is much work to be done in the years ahead, and you have been a big part of launching us on our way.

We are grateful to all those who've helped us continue to provide place-based nature education and opportunities for hands-on restoration in the estuary and its adjacent watersheds, including Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the BC Conservation Foundation, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (summer students), BC Community Gaming, Island Return-It in Duncan, Pacific Industrial and Marine, and CVRD Area D and E Grants-in-Aid. In this challenging year, we are also especially grateful for the additional support we received during the Covid-19 pandemic from Canada's Emergency Wage Program.

## Going Forward

In the years ahead, we want to continue to expand our school program offerings and increase access for children and youth of all ages to hands-on nature and science-based education. While our school programs are an important source of revenue for us, our primary commitment is to reach more young people and give them increased opportunities to learn about and fall in love with local ecosystems and the natural world. Working with the local watershed educators' group, "Watershed Connection", and by continuing to expand program accessibility through our bursary fund, we aim to make the hands-on programming we offer more accessible and relevant to local Indigenous, immigrant and low-income young people. We will continue to support youth in doing hands-on restoration projects in the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds, and we will continue to explore new opportunities to ensure the Centre is sustainable and self-supporting for the long-term.

The generosity of our supporters and donors makes a huge difference to what we can do.



**Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society**  
**Consolidated Statement of Operations** **2020**

**INCOME**

Donations	6,082
Fundraising	10,581
Grants	59,193
Nature Centre Activities	20,583
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>96,439</b>

**EXPENSES**

Project & Program	22,327
Personnel	47,820
Facility	12,016
Administration	8,441
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>90,604</b>
<b>Gross Operating Income</b>	<b>5,835</b>

Allocations	(5,741)
<b>Net Operating Income</b>	<b>94</b>

Capital Asset Activity	(3,035)
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	<b>(2,941)</b>

**Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society**  
**Consolidated Statement of Financial Position** **31-Dec-20**

**ASSETS**

Cash & Investments	74,266
Other Current Assets	22,612
Fixed Assets	216,824
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>313,702</b>

**LIABILITIES**

Payables	5,152
Unexpended Grants	22,184
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>27,336</b>

**NET ASSETS**

Operating Surplus	5,038
Reserves	64,504
Invested In Fixed Assets	216,824
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>286,366</b>

<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>313,702</b>
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