



Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

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Annual Report 2014 – 2015



Introduction

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre, located in Hecate Park in Cowichan Bay, BC is an interpretive centre with interactive educational opportunities for both children and adults to learn about the Cowichan Estuary, its watershed, marine and other wildlife, and natural and cultural history. The Centre includes an indoor classroom with both freshwater and inter-tidal aquariums and a touch tank. Visitors can access microscopes, a wildlife viewing telescope, interactive displays and maps. An outdoor wildlife viewing platform and interpretive trails explain the biological diversity of the 400 hectare estuarine ecosystem which provides vital habitat for resident and migratory birds and commercially important fish. The estuary was severely degraded over a number of decades. Environmental monitoring, management, and restoration activities are now having a positive impact. Public education and awareness is critical to the estuary's ongoing recovery.

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Year – April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015

The Centre is 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 aquarium and touch tank have a range of both colorful and camouflaged intertidal creatures. We have two stations that play 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. A three-dimensional wall model of our watersheds is complimented by an interactive touch screen map nearby which provides information on many aspects of the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds.



Visitors

Since opening on April 21, 2012 we have had over 11,500 visitors. We now host over 5,000 visitors each year, with a good mix of tourists and local residents. New temporary displays and creatures in the touch tank bring many visitors back for repeat visits. We are open to the public Wednesday through Sunday in the summer and Thursday through Sunday afternoons from September to June. We are also open holiday Mondays.

School Watershed & Marine Biology Programs

We have developed marine school program curricula for different grades and ages linked with the Province's "Prescribed Learning Outcomes". We also partner with the Cowichan Watershed Board to deliver a Cowichan River and Watershed program focused on grades four and five. This year we had close to 1,000 students participate in 32 school program offerings.



Our school programs are a popular educational resource for both public and private schools within School District 79. We also provide programming for S.E.A. Programs, a residential ocean learning program for students from Calgary, giving us the opportunity to provide hands-on learning for up to 1,000 additional students each year.

We also host Professional Development Days for teachers to increase access for those wishing to integrate river, ocean and estuary-related knowledge into classroom.

For pre-school aged children, a dedicated volunteer who is a retired librarian hosts and also brings in guest story tellers for regular story-time events in the spring and fall with up to 20 children and parents in each week.



Summer Science Camps

In 2014 we held four week-long full-day summer science camps for school aged children. Campers participated in beach seine netting, bird surveys, canoe expeditions through the estuary, and explorations aided by microscope and telescope. In this photo below campers got a surprise visit and some great lessons on water conservation from local Watershed Superhero, Water Woman.



We are expanding both our school and summer science camp programs in 2015-16, and adding a youth leadership program, as word spreads about our centre and what we offer.



Community Education and Events



The Nature Centre regularly hosts and participates in community events that increase outreach and access to environmental education. In April 2014 local bee advocate Ted Leischner presented a workshop on the ecological role of Bumble Bees and bee habitat. In June 2014 Marine Biologist Ramona DeGraff, who has a passion for forage fish, present an educational session to Centre volunteers.

International Low Tide Day was our big annual event in May 2014. The photo on the left below shows Cowichan Valley Naturalist and Nature Centre volunteer Eric Marshall talking with local children about a ghost crab.

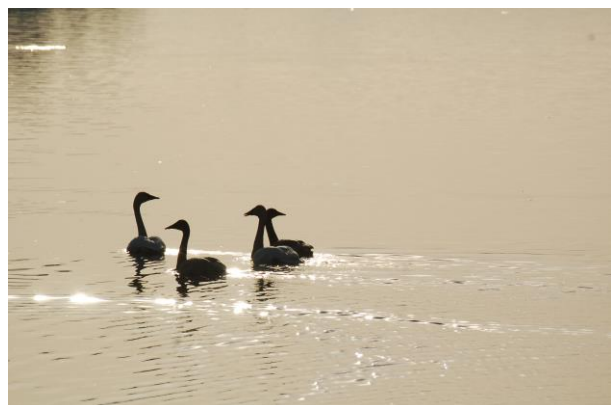


We organized the Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-up for BC Rivers Day in September and in January 2015 we co-hosted, along with the Somenos Marsh Society, a presentation on wetland restoration by wildlife biologist and wetland ecologist Tom Biebighauser.

We also offered regular film nights throughout the year. This year's films included: "Stand", a film about paddle-boarders opposing tanker traffic on the coast of the Great Bear Rainforest; "Revolution", Rob Stewart's moving environmental sequel to "Sharkwater"; and award-winning filmmakers Burtynsky and Baichwal's "Watermark" on how our human world is shaped by water for World Water Day. We also had a fun holiday season showing of the world's best birding comedy, "The Big Year".

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 also identify, count, and report any dead birds found on the beach. This citizen-based science initiative began with training in bird identification for volunteers who come out to count birds in all weather. Bird survey dates are on the Nature Centre website. No experience is required to participate.

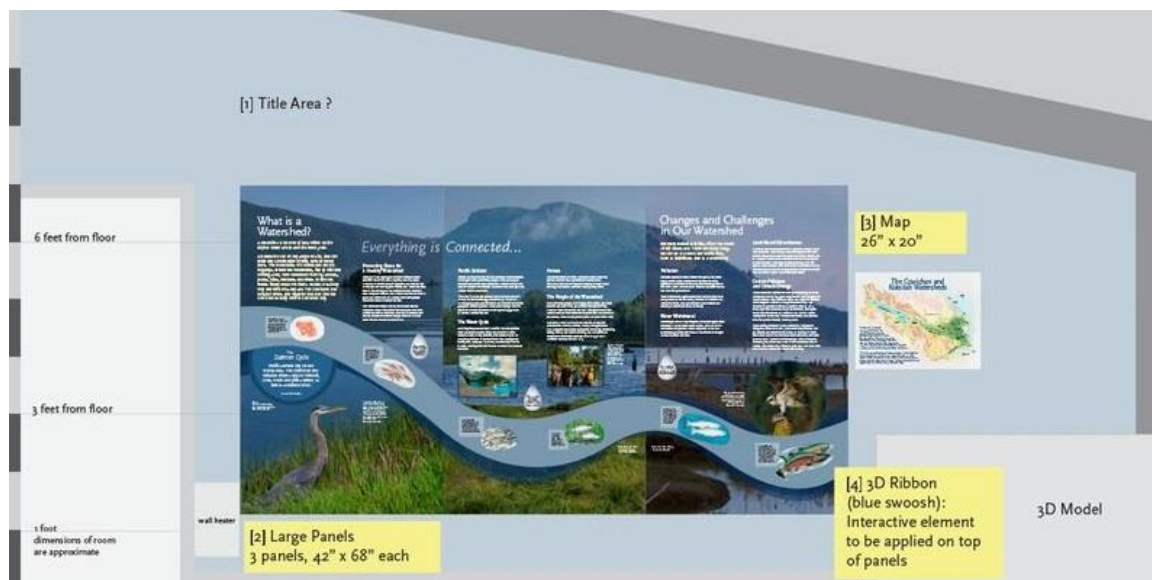


We also actively keep an eye on the Pacific Great Blue Herons nesting in the ravine near the Centre. Trudy Chatwin, Species at Risk Biologist for the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations reported 2014 was a good year for Cowichan Bay's Herons with a total of 89 Active nests. Monitoring on 52 visible nests in 14 trees by Madrone Environmental Services calculated an average of 2.7 fledged chicks per nest which extrapolates about 239 chicks fledged!

Interactive Watershed Exhibit in Development

In the summer of 2014 we began working in partnership with the Royal BC Museum to develop a three-dimensional interactive exhibit of the Cowichan and Koksilah Watershed. This ambitious project began last year with the support of the Pacific Salmon Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment, Telus, the Cowichan Watershed Board and the Cowichan Valley Regional District. Designed to provide engaging learning opportunities for all ages, the exhibit will include a full wall of interpretive panels focusing on the watershed and weaving in the story of the salmon cycle. An eight-foot three-dimensional table model will show the watershed's geography and animate how it is affected by droughts, storms, tides and human impacts. Stories of the watersheds' history, peoples, ecosystems and wildlife will be projected on the model's surface at the touch of a button.

We're excited to be working with experts from RBCM's exhibit design and production team, as well as with talented local artists and photographers, to create this exceptional learning experience for school groups and visitors. Fundraising for this exhibit will remain a focus in the coming year as we work toward installation and opening of the exhibit early in 2016. We have \$10,000 yet to raise to complete the exhibit. Donations of \$1,000 or more will be acknowledged as a part of the exhibit. You can donate [here](#).



Volunteering & Staffing

The Centre has two part-time staff, Coordinator Meghan Loop and Aquaria Technician Jared Bates. Madeleine Southern works with us on contract as a Marine Educator. In partnership with Canada Summer Jobs, this year we were once again lucky to have two full-time summer students who provided leadership in our camp program. We also hosted two Canada World Youth placements and a youth mentorship through the Community Options Society. Together staff and our hard-working team of volunteers kept the Centre running.

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 offer regular seasonal orientations for new volunteers and updates and knowledge-building events to support our seasoned volunteers, whose contributions are so essential to our work.

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

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre was originally 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, rich in tradition, history, and wildlife, and also an ecosystem at risk from development and industrial activities. Working under the auspices of the Cowichan Land Trust, a non-profit society and registered charity that holds conservation covenants, development funding was received from the West Coast Community Adjustment Program (WestCCAP), Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), and locally through fundraising events and local partnerships with the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and the Rotary Club of Duncan, which contributed both money and many hours of volunteer labour to help build the Nature Centre and the viewing platform.

The development project included a 1,000 square foot nature classroom, a Green Shores restoration of eroded shoreline west 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 and is just a short walk to the foreshore. The Centre officially opened on April 21, 2012 with music, First Nations dancers and a crowd of about 250 people.



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 science education and stewardship that inspires visitors to care for and protect the environment.



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. While we suggest an admission donation of \$5, our doors are open and we do not turn visitors away.

In our first two years of operations (April 2012 - March 2014) the Nature Centre generated revenues of \$88,000, the majority of which was earmarked grants to develop educational programs and exhibits, leaving a minimal amount of money available to deliver programming and cover general operations. This resulted in a cumulative shortfall of \$4,700 as of March 2014. In 2014-15 we obtained an additional operational grant of \$10,000 which helped us to reduce our cumulative shortfall to \$1,000 as of March 2015. In order to be economically healthy over the long term the Nature Centre needs to raise an additional \$25,000 annually to continue to deliver quality accessible programming.

We are working on developing multiple revenue streams and exploring new opportunities to make the centre a sustainable and self-supporting place of learning. We hold two annual Beer and Burger fundraising events each year at the Cowichan Bay Pub, which are lots of fun and include live music – Celtic and mellow jazz are the current favorites - and a silent auction. The generosity of our supporters and donors makes a huge difference to what we can do.

Your Donations Make All the Difference

We encourage Cowichan Valley residents to support the Centre by becoming members: \$20-individual membership, \$35-family membership, or \$100-supporting members. Taking out a supporting membership makes a big difference. Charitable receipts are issued for all memberships and donations. Donations can be made at [Canada Helps](#) - use the drop-down menu and select "Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre".

Gift Shop

We have a small gift shop that brings in some revenue, primarily from selling t-shirts, water bottles, field guides, animal finger puppets and cards. We also have some beautiful pieces of local art on consignment. Currently we accept cash or cheques for purchases, and are looking for a simple volunteer-friendly system that would allow for debit purchases.



We also have Limited Edition 12 X 15 Giclée Estuary Prints "Fir Tree on Mt. Tzouhalem #3" by local Artist Peter Spohn \$140 each. Come by the Centre or call the Land Trust (250) 746-0227 for more information.

**Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre
Financial Report
April 2014 to March 2015**

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS	TOTAL	Operations	Programs	Interpretive Display Development	Store
INCOME					
Donations, Fundraising, Dues	12,024	11,779		245	
Nature Centre Grants	41,816	12,000	14,062	15,754	
Nature Centre Activities	16,739	205	15,551		982
Total Income	70,578	23,984	29,613	15,999	982
EXPENSES					
Project & Program Costs	21,978	1,286	4,923	15,999	(229)
Personnel Costs	33,175	18,827	14,348		
Facility Costs	8,273	8,273			
Administration & Other	3,523	3,523			
Total Operating Expenses	66,950	31,909	19,271	15,999	(229)
Net Operating Income	3,628	(7,925)	10,342	0	1,212
Capital Asset Activity	(6,790)	(8,964)		2,174	
Net Income	(3,162)	(16,889)	10,342	2,174	1,212
OPERATING SURPLUS (DEFICIT)					
Beginning operating surplus (deficit)	(4,655)				
Net operating income (loss) for the year	3,628				
Ending operating surplus (deficit)	(1,027)				